



# THE BUFFALO BILL STORIES

A WEEKLY PUBLICATION  
DEVOTED TO BORDER HISTORY

Issued Weekly. By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 68.

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## BUFFALO BILL AND THE GOLD GHOULS

OR  
DEFYING DEATH AT ELEPHANT ROCK



BY  
THE AUTHOR OF  
"BUFFALO BILL"

BUFFALO BILL HAD BEEN TOO QUICK FOR HIM, AND PUT IN A SHOT FROM HIS REVOLVER.





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## BUFFALO BILL AND THE GOLD GHOULS;

OF

### Defying Death at Elephant Rock.

By the author of "BUFFALO BILL."

#### CHAPTER I.

##### A CAPTURE.

It was a bright spring morning and the boy who was spurring his horse across the plain from Fort Rattle seemed to enjoy the cool morning breeze, as did his horse, which was cantering along with a dash and spirit that showed that it was in good trim for a long gallop.

It needed all its mettle, for Sherman Canfield, a typical border boy, who bestrode it, was off for the day on a hunting expedition, and he generally put his horse pretty well through its paces before he returned from one of his hunts.

Sherman, who was about sixteen years of age, sun-burnt, handsome and wiry, was going on what he expected would be his last hunt in the wild West for some time to come. Through his kindness to a Sergeant Fessenden, a soldier who had been sorely wounded by outlaws, and whom he rescued from death, he had been bequeathed one-half of a gold mine, which the sergeant had discovered, and which he left to the boy when he died.

Buffalo Bill, the great scout, who was then attached

to the staff of Colonel Carr, the commandant at Fort Rattle, had urged the youth to use the riches left him in securing a good education in the East, and Sherman Canfield had decided to take the advice of the Border King and go East to college, intending, however, to return to the wild border country as soon as his education was completed.

He was to leave for the East in two days, and this morning he had decided upon taking a long ride and hunt across the prairies.

Flying along at breakneck speed, boy and horse soon lost sight of the fort and came into a wild and slightly mountainous country, which lay to the westward, and where game abounded.

Into this country the boy was pressing on, when, as he came around the side of a huge rock that overhung the trail, a lariat fell from above, was tightened about his shoulders, and he was dragged from his horse.

The frightened animal plunged away, the boy falling on his face, partly unconscious. He was dragged to his feet a moment later, and found himself surrounded by a group of rough-looking men, all wearing black masks.



The boy's heart sunk within him like lead.

"The Gold Ghouls!" he muttered to himself.

This was the name applied to a band of outlaws which infested the trails in that vicinity, robbing the miners of their hard-earned gold.

In some way they had learned that Sherman Canfield knew the location of a rich gold mine—the one Sergeant Fessenden had discovered.

Once before, by orders of their chief, the Gold Ghouls had captured the boy, hoping to secure, by torturing him, directions as to the locality of the mine.

On that occasion the boy had escaped from the man in charge of him before he was taken to the outlaw's stronghold.

This time there was no chance for the boy, however.

He was securely bound and disarmed before he could make a struggle.

"We has yer this time, kid," said one of the masked figures, "and we blindfolds yer and takes yer to our stronghold—see?"

Sherman Canfield saw, but the prospects did not please him much. There was one ray of hope, however. His horse had galloped off in the direction of the fort, shaking off one of the outlaws, who had tried to catch it by the bridle. Sherman knew that when it arrived, riderless, at the fort, it would not be long before his friends, Buffalo Bill, king of scouts, would be hot upon his trail; and, like every border boy or border man, he had the greatest confidence in Buffalo Bill's ability to do anything he set out to do.

So he tried to make a good appearance before the outlaws, and smiled as the black cloth was tied about his face, blinding him completely.

A moment later he was started on a long journey. For nearly an hour he rode behind one of the outlaws. Then the party dismounted and climbed up a steep and rocky hill, finishing the journey by walking in single file, Sherman between two of them, over what, to the boy, appeared to be a narrow ridge over some great chasm.

It seemed a very long trail to the blindfolded boy, and once or twice when they halted he felt with his feet, and discovered that there was a drop-off on either side, and that they seemed to be walking along a ridge, not more than two feet in width.

At last a sigh of relief broke from one of the men's lips, and he said:

"Waal, yer made it, and yer is game clean through.

"Maybe, if yer had seen it, yer couldn't hev got through," said one of his captors.

"Try me."

"I'm durned ef I do," and the men continued on for about half a mile, still leading the captive, who was yet blindfolded.

At length they began to descend by a steep path, and after going a few hundred yards the guard halted, and one said:

"I'll take off yer blind now, as yer'll have ter see."

He did so, and for a while Sherman's eyes were dazed, but then he saw after they became accustomed to the light, and he found they were descending another steep cliffside to a canyon far below, and which was filled with heavy timber.

Several columns of smoke were curling upward from among the timber, rising above the treetops, but then floating off into mist as they struck the upper currents of air.

The youth gazed at the scene with interest, for he felt that the end of their journey was near, that there was a camp in the depths of the canyon.

Down the steep face of the cliff they went, along as dangerous a trail as had been the climb up from the meadow, and at last reached the bottom just where there was a large pool, or small lake, the water seeming very deep and to come from springs, as there was a constant flow from it, forming a rivulet that glided down the canyon.

In the midst of the tall and massive trees in the canyon, Sherman Canfield beheld a camp, and about it were half a dozen men.

It was not such a camp as he had expected to find, for there were substantial log houses, with rock chimneys, and they had the appearance of having been built for some time.

Down the canyon some distance was a meadow, upon which scores of horses were feeding, and Sherman Canfield felt that he had been brought to the retreat of the band of Gold Ghouls, which he had heard so much about through campfire tales, and which, it was said, no one had been able to find.

He remembered that it was said that the masked Gold Ghouls, when pursued, after committing a crime, most mysteriously disappeared, and could not be tracked.

He had come there on foot a part of the way, and from what he had passed through he did not wonder that the retreat was never discovered.

There were horses in plenty in the canyon, and this showed that there was some way for them to get to the mysterious retreat when mounted.

There were seven or eight men about the cabins, and upon seeing a prisoner they at once hastened to put on their masks, so when the guard arrived with his captive Sherman was not able to see a single face.

Sherman Canfield was glad that he had at least reached the retreat of the outlaws, yet he was confident that from what he knew of the way there the scout would not be able to track him.

That the outlaws had a lair so near the fort and settlement which remained undiscovered, was proof of how well they covered up their tracks, and what a thoroughly secure retreat they had found.

The men whom the youth now met greeted Slayback, the chief of the party which had captured him, with a nod and word, and one asked:

"What have you got there, pard?"



"A prisoner for the captain."

"He's a young 'un."

"Yes, and a bad one, too, I guess."

"Was he well fixed?"

"I don't know exactly what he's worth, but the lieutenant roped him in, and seemed to think he would pan out big, so sent me on to the retreat with him."

If he don't materialize, well, it will be the end of him, for you know our motto, pard:

"To enter here  
Is to leave hope behind."

"That's so."

"But that is for the chief to say."

"Is the chief here?"

"No; he left the lair this morning, but will be back to-morrow."

"Then I will have to wait until he comes."

"See here, young fellow, I'll put shackles on you and turn you loose, but to-night you occupies my cabin; but let me tell yer, ef yer tries ter escape from this outfit, yer signs yer own death warrant, for nobody that don't belong to this band leaves this retreat, that's dead squar'."

"I would not know which way to go if I did get away."

"No, but you'd soon find out, for you hain't no fool."

"Just wait here," and Slayback entered one of the cabins, but soon returned with manacles, which he locked upon the ankles of his young prisoner.

Sherman made no resistance, looking coolly on, and his pluck won the admiration of the outlaws, several of them commenting upon it.

His hands were then untied, and he was told to go about at will, so long as he did not leave the immediate vicinity of the cabins.

Night was falling, and the outlaws began to cook their supper, and the boy watched them with interest, for he was half-starved.

He wondered if he was going to be given a square meal.

When supper was ready he was told to join them, Slayback telling him:

"Pitch in, young feller, for if you is as hungry as I is yer could tackle coyote meat."

Sherman Canfield did "pitch in," and he was surprised at the good supper the outlaws had, of broiled bacon, venison steaks, birds, roasted potatoes, ash cake and coffee.

"If you is ter be here long, pard, ther cap will hev ter git a' extra supply o' grub," said one of the outlaws.

Sherman laughed, and soon after was sound asleep.

He arose at daylight, and hobbled out of the cabin.

One of the outlaws was building up a fire, another getting wood, and both quickly drew their masks over their faces at sight of him.

"You is an early riser, boy," said one.

"Yes; when I cannot sleep, there is no need of lying in bed."

"Scared, eh?"

"Of what?"

"Our killin' yer."

"Oh, no; I take things as they come, and will not be frightened until there is no hope for me."

"Guess the chief will be here to-day."

"Who is he?"

"Don't know."

"Don't know who your chief is?"

"No."

"That is strange."

"Waal, it's so."

"Where is he?"

"Don't know."

"Don't he stay here?"

"Sometimes."

"But is away now?"

"He be."

"Yet comes to-day?"

"We expects him to-day."

"What is his name?"

"Don't know."

"What do you call him?"

"Chief an' cap'n."

"Then you do not know him by any name?"

"I doesn't, and, if any of the band do, I don't know it."

"What kind of looking man is he?"

"Don't know."

"You are not blind?"

"No, I has darned good eyes."

"And yet cannot tell how your chief looks?"

"Would you know my face ag'in if yer met me elsewhere?"

"I haven't seen your face."

"Jist so. I hasn't seen ther chief's face."

"Ah! he goes masked, then, like you?"

"No, not like me."

"How, then?"

"He wears a black cap, with a tassel on ther end, and it pulls down over his head to his shoulders, with only holes for him to see through."

"A complete mask?"

"You bet: and he wears a black gown that covers his clothes, fallin' to ther ground almost, and only his feet is visible."

"Is he ashamed to be seen?"

"Waal, he don't allow nobody ter see his face or form, and that hain't all."

"What else?"

"He rides a horse which has his head and body—yes, and even his legs, hid, too, the black cloth hidin' saddle, bridle and all."

"I tell yer, boy, he do look awful terrible."

"Like the black ghost of a horse and man?"



"Jist that."

"And keeps himself unknown to his own men?"

"You bet he does."

"But you are known to him?"

"Oh, yes, he's got us down fine, you bet."

"I should like to see him."

"Better feel sorry."

"Why?"

"It's big chances to nothin' he orders you shot."

"Why?"

"It may be his notion."

"I've done him no harm."

"That makes no difference."

"Does he not stay here?"

"He comes and goes."

"We don't know when ter expect him until he rides inter ther canyon, only we thinks he'll be erlong now, seein' as the lieutenant who sent you here must have reported, and I guess you was held for some good reason."

"I hope so, at least; but see there!"

The man turned his gaze down the canyon, and cried, quickly:

"There he comes now!"

"Who?"

"The chief."

## CHAPTER II.

### THE CHIEF OF THE GOLD GHOULS.

Sherman Canfield's gaze was turned upon the one whom the outlaw had said was the Gold Ghouls' chief with intense interest.

The man who had been talking to him was preparing breakfast, and the youth was watching him while they talked, with a look that showed his night of sleeplessness had not taken away his appetite.

The other outlaw who had been about had gone off some distance for wood, and was returning with a large bundle upon his shoulders.

But Sherman was all eyes now for the coming chief.

He had forgotten the preparation for breakfast in the great interest in the one who held his destiny in his hand.

He saw a horse and man approaching slowly up the canyon.

The man was enveloped from head to foot in a black gown that completely shielded his head, face and form.

Over his horse also was thrown a black blanket, so that it would be impossible to tell even the color of the animal, or get a glimpse of his saddle and bridle.

A closer look at these coverings showed that they were made of the finest rubber.

Certainly the wearer did not intend that either himself or his horse should be known.

The word that the chief was coming was quickly passed along the cabins, and half a dozen men were soon assembled to greet him.

He drew rein near the fire, dismounted, left his horse standing, and came toward Sherman.

The boy's eyes were riveted upon him, and he noticed that he was of large size, yet stooped in his walk, and was certainly round-shouldered.

His hands were gloved by the same rubber covering, and the coat he wore fell to his feet, yet revealed small feet, and that he wore gold spurs.

The chief regarded him a moment in silence, and then said:

"I heard that you were captured and sent here, and that you were one of a band of gold-hunters. Yes, and you were with the dying soldier, Sergeant Fessenden, when he breathed his last?"

"I was."

"And the sergeant told you his story?"

"He told me to take his personal effects to the fort and send them to his wife."

"You know where the sergeant's mine and gold is—I believe that he told you all, and I swear to you that you shall tell me, or I will kill you!"

Sherman Canfield felt a thrill run through his heart at the words of the savage chief, for he had fairly roared out his threat, being worked into a violent passion at what he considered the loss of a fortune.

The men trembled, for they knew their chief, and feared him greatly.

They expected to see him spring upon the youth and drive a knife to his heart.

But, whatever he may have felt inwardly, Sherman Canfield did not outwardly show it.

His fearless face did not change color, he did not flinch from the masked chief, and he looked squarely into the two holes through which glanced the eyes of the leader of the Gold Ghouls.

He argued quickly that, as he was supposed to know the sergeant's secret, to be able to serve as guide to the mine, his life was safe.

And so the men and the chief were astounded to hear him calmly respond to the latter's threat:

"I can die but once, and don't you think for a moment that I am afraid to, when my time comes, or you'll fool yourself."

The men gazed at each other in amazement, while one, the man whom Sherman had been talking to when the chief came up, said, in a whisper:

"Don't, boy pard, or he'll jump yer."

Sherman's face flushed, for the words seemed uttered in kindness.

He remembered that the man had asked Slayback to put less heavy manacles upon his feet, and he had been the one to show him his bed, and make him as comfortable as possible.

He had also helped him most generously at supper the night before, and now was the one to urge him to have a care how he spoke to the dreaded chief.

It was but little to pin hope to, but under the circumstances Sherman felt it, and he said no more.



The chief had turned and paced to and fro several times, and then said, savagely:

"Gorman, serve my breakfast in my cabin, and afterward bring that boy there, for I wish to have a talk with him."

"Yes, chief," answered Gorman, and Sherman saw that he was the man who had at least not been unkind to him.

The chief wheeled and walked away to a cabin that stood apart from the others, back under the cliff, his horse following, and then Sherman noticed that the animal's hoofs were muffled, so as to prevent his leaving a trail.

The chief opened the door with a key he had carried and entered the cabin, the horse taking his stand near by.

Sherman sat down upon a log near the fire, while the men regarded him curiously, one of them breaking the silence that followed the chief's departure with:

"See here, kid, thet tongue o' yours is goin' ter git yer neck in trouble."

"How so?"

"Yer don't know the chief."

"I don't wish to."

"Waal, he's one ter git acquainted, and see if he don't git quite intimate with you afore you die."

"Oh, I suppose he will kill me."

"Yer don't seem ter sigh over it a heap."

"What's the use?"

"Does yer know whar ther glitter is?"

"What do you mean?"

"The sergeant's dust."

"If I did I wouldn't tell."

"Does yer think more of another man's gold than yer does of yer life?"

"Maybe I do, maybe I don't."

"Waal, my advice to yer is ter spit out what yer knows, and jine this band, if yer ever want ter see yer home and mother ag'in."

The allusion made Sherman cast a retrospective glance, and he was silent.

Then Gorman gave him his breakfast, with the remark:

"This will brace you, lad."

Sherman went to work with a will at his breakfast, while Gorman went to carry the chief his, for he never unmasked before his men, but ate alone in his cabin when he was at the retreat.

When the youth had finished his breakfast, Gorman said:

"Come, boy pard, we'll go now."

He called out, as he approached the cabin, and asked if the chief wished to see the prisoner, and received a gruff answer in the affirmative.

"Say, boy pard, go slow, and don't make him mad."

"He won't kill yer as long as he thinks yer knows whar ther sergeant's gold is; and you knows whether ter tell or not, only hold out as long as yer kin."

So whispered Gorman, as he led the young prisoner to the chief's cabin.

It was a more comfortable structure than the others, had two shutter windows in it, one on each side of the door, and it was by no means an unpleasant abiding place.

There was a hammock hung in it instead of a bed, a number of bear and buffalo skins were upon the floor. Mexican *serapes* were scattered about, and upon brackets on the wall, each side of the door, were rifles and revolvers, ready for use.

A table, rudely made, was in the center of the room, and in an easy-chair of rustic manufacture was seated the chief, who said, sternly, as Sherman Canfield entered the door:

"Now, boy, tell me where that gold mine is, or I'll take you to the Indian village and have them burn you alive at the stake."

### CHAPTER III.

#### SCOUT CODY ON THE TRAIL.

There was great excitement in Fort Rattle when Sherman Canfield's horse arrived there without his rider.

Buffalo Bill was off on a scout, and, although Colonel Carr thought it likely that the boy had been captured again by the Gold Ghouls, he did not send an expedition out after him immediately, knowing that Buffalo Bill was the only man who could successfully follow the boy's trail.

Late that afternoon Buffalo Bill arrived at the fort, and, after learning of the boy's disappearance, immediately started preparations for a chase, although he himself had been in the saddle all day.

It was after nightfall when he and his scouts started forth upon the search for Sherman Canfield.

In starting out, Buffalo Bill had taken fourteen men with him.

He had picked his very best trailers, men who could track an Indian, and were rich in devices and the cunning of border warfare.

He had carried a couple of pack-animals, well laden with provisions, extra ammunition and all else that he thought might be needed.

He rode at once to the meadow under the cliff, and went into camp in some timber there.

The horses were staked out, blankets spread, and the men turned in for what rest they could get until morning.

But they were up and at work at daylight, all on foot excepting two men left to cook breakfast and take care of the horses and the camp.

They ranged all along the base of the cliff, looking for a place to ascend, but could find no trail, when they heard the whistle calling them to breakfast, and the scouts flatly said the cliffs could not be scaled.

"You forget, boy, that the men who had the youth



a prisoner went that way," said Buffalo Bill, in his quiet way.

"You are right, chief; the cliffs have a trail up them, only we haven't found it, but we'll try again after breakfast," said one of the scouts, and the others were also convinced from what the chief had said that there must be some way of getting up the cliffs, and all said that find it they would, for they would not be outwitted by a gang of cutthroats.

After they had finished their breakfast, they all went to the base of the cliffs, and once more began the search for the trail.

The cliff was like a wall in many places, being perpendicular for fifty and a hundred feet upward, and again, where there was a break, a shelf something over twenty feet from the base.

But along the base for the length of the canyon there was no footing to be found in the massive wall of rock, no break lower down than twenty feet.

The scouts returned to their chief in great disappointment.

They found him standing with his lariat in hand, and preparing to throw the coil upward.

There was a slight slope in the wall there, and within the reach of a lariat there was a shelf whereon grew a stunted cedar and a few bushes.

The scouts watched their chief closely, for they felt that he, as was his wont, had "struck it rich," as one of the men expressed it.

The throw was made; the lariat caught on the cedar, and Buffalo Bill, drawing it taut, called out:

"Here, Jenks, you are a light fellow in weight, so go up and see if from that shelf a way can be found up to the top of the cliff, for we could not ride around and get there without going many a mile, if even then we could get horses upon the top."

Jenks caught hold of the lariat, and quickly went up to the rocky shelf.

It was a minute before he spoke, and all eyes were upon him, as he said:

"I think you've hit dead center, chief."

He disappeared from sight back upon the rocks, and was gone so long that at last Buffalo Bill said:

"One of you fellows of lighter weight go up and see if Jenks has gone to sleep up there.

"In fact, it would be better for two of you to be along."

Another of the scouts of lighter weight climbed the lariat, reached the shelf, and disappeared.

He was gone but a minute, when he darted again into view, his face white, while he cried:

"Chief Cody, Jenks is dead!

"He has been murdered!"

Large man that he was, at the startling report of the second scout who had climbed the lariat to the shelf, and so quickly brought the tidings of his comrade's fate, Buffalo Bill seized the lasso and ascended rapidly to the rocky shelf.

There stood the man who had said that Jenks was dead, and he was almost unnerved by the shock, brave as he was.

Hardly had the chief gone up, when half a dozen lariats were thrown, and caught on the cedar, and the scouts at once began to ascend to the side of their leader.

Buffalo Bill had, meanwhile, followed the scout back from the edge of the shelf.

There was a break in the cliff there, forming something like a cavern, and, going back through it for a hundred feet, they came to a well-like opening from there to the cliff above.

But in this space, like as though at the bottom of a large and deep well, lay the form of Jenks, and he was dead.

There was a gash upon his head, and he had evidently been dealt some terrible blows from above.

"He was killed with this rock," and Buffalo Bill picked up a piece of rock weighing all of ten pounds.

It lay loose on the rock flooring, and had certainly fallen from above.

The other scouts now began to gather upon the scene, and one said:

"It broke off and fell upon poor Jenks just as he came in here.

"We must be careful, chief."

"Not from fear of rocks breaking off and falling upon us, but of their being thrown down.

"Stand back under shelter of the arch, men," and the chief spoke in a low, stern tone that showed he was deeply moved.

"You think he was killed then, sir?"

"Yes."

"See this side of the rock."

"It was just picked up from where it was half-imbedded in the soil, for, you see, it is wet.

"That proves it did not break off from the rock above and fall."

There was no denying that Buffalo Bill read the signs aright, and the rock was passed from hand to hand among the scouts.

"Poor Jenks; he never knew what killed him," said Brandon, the lieutenant of the scout band.

"You are wrong, Brandon, for you see the rock struck Jenks almost squarely in the face, crushing in his forehead."

"I see that, chief."

"And you notice that Jenks' revolver is in his hand, and cocked, so you may be sure he had some reason for drawing it, and he had doubtless discovered his foe above, and intended to kill him, but was given the fatal blow before he could pull the trigger.

"Jenks lay on his back, which shows that he was leaning backward and looking upward when struck, for otherwise he would have fallen on his face.

"Some of you boys wrap his body up, and leave it on the shelf by the tree, and then we will push on up



the side of the cliff, for I am sure that we can reach the top from that starting-point."

The body was wrapped in a blanket, and laid near the tree, and, Buffalo Bill leading the way, began to make the climb.

He soon took his boots off, and, tying them together, slung them over his back, while he called back:

"If any of you boys cannot trust your heads, you had better not make the climb, or there will be others to bury."

Several of the scouts were already growing dizzy, and they at once took advantage of the chief's words to return to the tree, and he called to them to go back to camp, and take the body of Jenks with them.

There were just eight men who followed their leader up the dizzy climb along the face of the cliff, which rose there to the height of five hundred feet above the meadow land.

Those below, having descended to the meadow, stood watching their daring comrades with awe and admiration, for, though men without fear themselves, their natures were so constituted as to cause them to grow dizzy when on lofty places, as is the case of very many people.

The chief at last reached the top, and stood gazing down at the others strung out on the cliff.

Not having started just as Slayback and his prisoner had, they had taken a far more perilous way up, one the outlaws would not have risked, and had reached the summit in safety.

Fearless as they were by nature, the scouts were wondering all the way up if the chief would return by the way he ascended, and there was much foreboding felt among them, in case he did so, as to the result.

Calmly stood Buffalo Bill, surveying his men, and saying a pleasant word to each one as he gained the summit.

He knew the great danger, and dared not leave the spot until each one had landed in safety.

Far below him he saw the men in the meadow, the body of Jenks lying at their feet, while they looked in horror at the daring climbers.

At last the rear man reached the summit, and but for the quickly-extended hand of the chief he would have reeled and fallen backward.

Their comrades in the valley waved their hats, but uttered no cheer, for they were too well trained for that.

Then the chief, after a moment spent for the men to regain their breath, led the way over to where they must find the well-like fissure in the mountain at the bottom of which poor Jenks met his death.

They pulled on their boots once more, and walked quickly in the direction they expected to find the opening.

The top of the cliff was rugged, uneven, and stretched away in vast expanse toward a distant range of mountains.

It was almost treeless, and it would seem that nothing save to commit crime or escape from death would tempt man to go to so drear a spot.

A quarter of a mile from where they reached the summit of the cliff, they came to the fissure in the earth.

It seemed as though the cliff had split in twain back from the canyon for several hundred yards, then closed up again, leaving a tunnel-like passage below, and not fully closing toward the end of the break, and this formed the well-like opening.

Down into the place the scouts gazed, and then began to search around the top.

There were numerous rocks scattered about, and one place from which a piece had been very recently removed, for the resting-place of it was moist still.

"That was where the rock came from that killed Jenks, and now we must find the trail of his murderer," said the chief.

As they looked down, they saw there were breaks, or shelves, in the wall of rock all the way down, natural, yet about thirty feet apart, and arranged with a regularity as though cut there.

As their eyes became accustomed to the dim light below, they saw that from one of the shelves to another hung a rope.

The upper end was made fast to a rock, and the lower end hung loose upon the shelf below.

"See here, men, that rope tells the story.

"There were ropes hanging from the top down to each shelf, and the man who killed Jenks was watching us, and, when he saw me throw the lariat, ran back and made his escape.

"He pulled each rope up after him, but was too hurried to get that one, or missed it for some reason, and had reached the top, gotten that stone, and threw it down upon Jenks when he saw that he was discovered.

"Now, let us see where the upper rope was fastened here."

They were not long in making this discovery, as a cedar grew some twenty feet away from the aperture, and the mark of a rope around its base was distinctly visible.

Then, too, there was the line along on the rocky soil where it had passed, and a pad was found, which had evidently been put over the ledge to prevent its wearing the rope.

"We must find these ropes, men, and the necks for them to encircle," said Buffalo Bill, grimly, and, calling for the lariats of the scouts, he soon had them fastened together, then one end passed around the tree and the other two dropped down to the shelf, where the rope was fastened.

Though there were volunteers for the descent, the chief slung himself over the edge and went down.

He unfastened the end of the rope about the rock, put it about his waist, and climbed up to the top.



"New rope, one inch in size, tied in knots for hand-rests, with here and there a loop for a foot-rest.

"It was, of course, bought in Overland City, and it took all of three hundred feet for the use it was put to.

"I must find out who has been purchasing so much rope of late in Overland City.

"Now, we'll see what we can find in the way of trails upon this ridge-top."

The men scattered, and began to hunt like Indians for a trail.

They stuck to their work untiringly and patiently, never thought of rest or dinner, and did not give up the hunt until nearly sunset, when they all assembled a mile away from the starting point.

They had made no discovery, and Buffalo Bill could only account for the escape of the outlaw, or outlaws, from the ridge by saying that they had descended from the ridge by the same means they had gotten up, a line of ropes, and had taken them with them.

Where they had gone it was impossible to discover, and the glasses of the scouts revealed only the wildest country beyond the ridge.

The outlaws had used the ridge as a means of escape on foot; if cornered, by means of the ropes, and, retreating from there, had gone no one knew where.

To go around and follow them would be a long and tedious work, and, not knowing where to strike for their retreat in that wild mountain range, all would be guesswork, while it would take a regiment of scouts to hem them in.

"Men, I regret to say that we are baffled, utterly baffled.

"We can return by that hole, with this rope and our lariats descend and soon get to camp.

"Then our plans must be to find out who the Gold Ghouls are, and shadow them down; but now we are wholly baffled," and the scout led the retreat toward the camp.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE OUTLAW'S PLEA.

When the masked and savage chief of the Gold Ghouls made the threat he did to Sherman Canfield, he seemed to feel that he would terrify and frighten the youth into an immediate confession of all he knew of the sergeant's gold-mine.

To the surprise of the chief, the youth looked him squarely in the face, and replied:

"I have seen Indians, and they are no more cruel than you are."

"Do you defy me?" roared the outlaw.

"I am in your power, and in irons; you are master here, and an outlaw, so I can do nothing."

The masked outlaw chief turned savagely upon the youth, drew his revolver from his belt, cocked it deliberately, and, pointing it at his heart, said, sternly:

"Confess all you know about that gold mine or you have but one minute to live!"

Not a muscle of the boy's face quivered, and he answered, fearlessly:

"I know nothing that you can force from me by threats."

An oath broke from the outlaw's lips, and he again walked back and forth across the cabin.

At last he changed his tactics completely.

He resumed his seat, and said, in a kindly tone, pointing to a second chair that was in the cabin:

"Sit down, young man."

Sherman Canfield obeyed in silence.

"See here, it is my profession to get gold. How I get it I do not care, and I work for it harder than the most industrious miner works with pick and shovel. Mine is brain work, and endurance of body as well, for I am constantly on the go. I take my life in my hand in seeking gold, and what I get is from the sweat of other men's brows; yes, blood-stained often, and more lives are given up in its defense. I do not feel just happy over this life, and yet I am not rich enough to give up yet. There is a belief in my mind that Sergeant Fessenden was a very rich man. Though enlisting as a private soldier, he was a man of superior education, of refinement and a gentleman. He was a geologist, and a botanist as well, and he made rocks, soils, trees and flowers the study of his life. He found, in his lone ramblings, a gold mine, and he began to work it at different times, alone. It was a long time before I suspected what his lone pilgrimages meant, and then I had him shadowed. But he was as cunning as an Indian, and too good a plainsman to be caught.

"Two men whom I sent to shadow him lost their lives, and he must have killed them, believing them to be seeking his life.

"One was dressed as a soldier, the other in the disguise of an Indian, and I found their bodies; but what they had about them had not been disturbed, though one had a belt with considerable money in it. I never heard that the sergeant ever reported these two deaths at the fort, so he kept his killing them to himself.

"You know just what happened; you know that the sergeant made a confidant of you before he died, and left his papers and all to your keeping. Knowing this, you could keep it for yourself, if you were not my prisoner. But, being my prisoner, you must buy your freedom, your life.

"Tell me where that mine is, guide me to it, and we will go halves, and you are free to go where you will. Now, you know just what I wish you to do, and, if you do not obey me, then your life shall be the forfeit. This I swear to you."

"You needn't swear to it to make me believe you will kill me, for I am sure that you will; but I wouldn't tell you if it was to save a thousand lives."



"Do you think you could find the mine, if you tried, from the spot where the sergeant was killed?"

"I might."

"Will you go there with me alone and make the attempt?"

Sherman Canfield was like a drowning man—he caught at a straw.

In going alone with the outlaw chief, the chance might come for him to make his escape, or even to kill him.

He would compromise to please himself, and so replied:

"I will go with you, but I won't say I can find the mine."

"All right; we will go together, but not for several days yet, as I have other work on hand just now."

"I will return here within a week, and be prepared for the trip, and you go with me," and, having called Gorman to take the prisoner in charge, the chief soon after mounted his horse and rode away.

When Gorman saw the chief ride away, he seated himself upon a log, and said, in his quaint way:

"Squat, boy pard."

Sherman sat down quietly, and, whittling a stick in silence for a while, Gorman then said:

"Did yer tell him?"

"No."

"Why, are you a member?" asked the boy, suddenly.

"Me?"

"Yes."

"Why shouldn't I be?"

"Well, in the first place, you have not the evil manner the others have, and you don't talk like a man who was wicked just because he wanted to be."

The man started at the words, and his eyes peered sharply through the holes in the mask straight into the face of the youth.

Sherman's question seemed to have struck some chord in his heart.

After a few minutes he said, abruptly:

"I am not bad because I wish to be, but for the reason that a cruel fate made me so."

His voice had suddenly changed, and he spoke for the first time without using the border dialect.

He looked still squarely at the youth, and, after a short silence, went on to say:

"Yes, it was my cruel fate that made me what I am to-day, and I can never battle against the destiny that has marked my life."

"You need not have become an outlaw if you had not wished to be one," boldly said Sherman.

"You think so, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, you shall hear my story, and be the judge."

"Do you know why I take a fancy to you?"

"Have you done so?"

"Yes, I have."

"Why?"

"Because you remind me of my younger brother, for I am not an old man, see?"

He took his mask from his face, and revealed it to the youth.

Sherman Canfield was surprised to see that he was so young, for he could scarcely be over twenty-three or twenty-four.

He was beardless, save for a mustache, and his dark eyes, white teeth and fine features made his face a handsome one.

He at once resumed his mask, with a quick glance toward the men's cabin, to see if his act had been observed.

But no one appeared to have seen it, and he went on to say:

"Yes, you are strangely like my younger brother, Harry, just seventeen years of age when I killed him, six years ago—eighteen months by junior."

"When you killed him?"

"Yes, for I did kill him, though not intentionally."

"We loved each other devotedly, but he was my parents' pet, and for some reason I was slighted continually, though I tried to be obedient to them."

"I was sent to college, and it was when I was home on vacation that he came into my room one day and accused me of slandering him to a young girl he was in love with."

"I was not guilty, and denied it, but he grew wild with rage, said that I lied, and in an ungovernable fit of fury said he would kill me, and sprung to the desk in my room where I had a loaded revolver—this is the weapon," and the man took a small revolver from his inner breast pocket and showed it to Sherman.

"I saw that my life was in danger, and sprung to seize the weapon, and in the struggle for it the revolver was discharged, and the bullet pierced the heart of my poor brother."

"I was dismayed, terrified, dazed, and the gallows rose before me, so I made at once my preparations to escape."

"We lived in the country; my parents were away from home for a couple of days; the revolver shot had not aroused the servants, and, hastily packing up a few things, I left the room, locking the door after me, and taking the key."

"I have the key now."

"I had, however, written to my parents the truth, leaving the letter upon my desk, and folded the dead hands of poor Harry upon his breast."

"I mounted my best horse, and rode rapidly away, and by sunset was miles from home."

"I caught a train at a small station, and, going to the nearest city, disguised myself, sold my watch, and with the money I had came Westward with all haste."

"I sought the mining country, but an accursed fate still dogged me and made me what I am."

"Did killing your brother by accident drive you to



commit crimes in earnest?" asked Sherman Canfield, when the outlaw paused in his story.

"It made me desperate; but I was a fool, as I afterward learned, but not until too late for me to return home.

"It was only a year ago that I took another life, and of a dear friend.

"I was in Overland City, and I had not heard from home since leaving, but I had a constant dread that I would be captured and taken back to be hanged, for I was sure my parents would so wish it.

"I was walking along one moonlight night, alone, when I met a man, who halted, looked at me, and cried:

"I've got you at last!

"You are Gorman Field!"

"Quick as a flash I had whipped out my revolver and pulled the trigger, for the man was a stranger in the camps, and I was sure that he was a detective on my track.

"He fell, mortally wounded, and then I learned that he was my old chum at college, and who was looking for me.

"He had asked who I was, said he wanted to find me, yet did not explain, and all thought, of course, that there had been trouble between us, and I had been too quick for him.

"He lived but a few minutes, yet long enough to tell me that my brother had been seized with insane fits while I was at college, making attempts, for imaginary wrongs, upon his mother, father and servants.

"They had hoped my coming home would cure him, but alas! he was seized with a desire to kill me, and the result I have told you.

"After leaving college, as I could nowhere be found, my good chum said that he would find me, and he started on the hunt.

"You know the result. Well, I was suspected of a murder and robbery in Overland City, and again I was innocent, but the miners intended to hang me and try me afterward, and I skipped, and joined the Gold Ghouls, for I knew the chief, and I guess I am the only man in the band who does.

"I have told you my story, pard, and that I took to you because you reminded me of my brother Harry, and you'll find I will do all I can to help you, though I tell you frankly, when the chief is sure you won't tell him where to get that gold, he'll kill you as sure as you are sitting here now."

"I do not doubt that, when he is sure I will not tell him."

"Then, my advice is for you to tell him, and then light out, for your life is worth more than gold, and you've got much to live for, while I have nothing."

"You are wrong there, for what made you a fugitive you were not at heart guilty of, and in killing your friend you were, as you believe, only saving yourself from arrest and carrying back to be hanged."

"Boy pard, you give me the first consolation I have had in six long years," said the outlaw, feelingly.

"Then let me give you more."

"Can you?"

"I'll try."

"You are not, at heart, a bad man, and you have leagued yourself with outlaws, because you did not know what else to do to save your life. Now, have you been very bad since you have been a member of the band?"

"No, for I have escaped having to be by mere luck, however."

"Well, suppose you decide to turn over a new leaf, and be pards with me."

"To do what?"

"To get out of this at first, and then help me."

"Can I trust you?"

"With your life," was the earnest response.

"Then let me tell you a secret."

"The mine I have a half-share in, if I choose to claim it, and I'll tell you what I'll do."

"Well?"

"You have got full power here, and can go and come as you please?"

"Yes."

"There are some fine horses here, and you, as cook, have the run of the provisions."

"True."

"And the weapons?"

"Yes."

"Now, as you are not at heart an outlaw, and I never intend to be, and if I stay here I will be killed, and you will be guilty of my death, I say that we can skip out together, and, well mounted, armed and equipped, we will go, and half of my share I will give to you, and you can get out of this country and go where you may yet be contented, if not happy, and comfortably off as well.

"What do you say?"

"Boy pard, you hold out a big temptation to me, for it will let me save you from death, and that I think more of than the gold I will get, though I believe all is as you say it is.

"I'll tell you that I know this country even better than Buffalo Bill, and that is saying a great deal; but I have hunted it all over for gold, and it was I who told the chief of this retreat, and he came to it last fall, with his men, and there are secrets about it that he and I only know. I'm your friend, and I'll think over what you say, and let you know to-morrow—at any rate, if I do not go, you shall, boy pard."

## CHAPTER V.

### CONSIDERING.

Sherman Canfield could have given a whoop for joy at the words of the outlaw, but he wisely restrained his feelings, and simply said:



"All right, pard; I'll expect you to go with me."

"Yes, you wish to snatch a brand from the burning, as it were," answered the Gold Ghoul; and he arose, and went back to his cabin to prepare for the noonday meal.

Sherman still remained seated where he left him, for with his feet manacled close together his keepers had no fear of his escape, and even would not have supposed he could do so if free.

"Now, is he playing me, or in earnest?"

This question the youth asked himself, when left alone.

He thought the matter over carefully, and mused about as follows:

"If he is playing me, then I will make a big mistake, but I'll have to pretend to trust him, and then fix him at the first break he makes to play me false.

"I don't think he's bad at heart.

"He does not look it or talk it.

"He was kind to me from the first, and I noticed he sat eying me in a strange way when Slayback brought me here.

"He talks like an educated man, too, and he unmasked his face for me to look at it.

"If his story is true, he certainly has had a big run of bad luck, and I heard one of the men telling him this morning that provisions were getting low, and he would have to send some one to Overland City, as he would not dare go himself.

"Now, if I get out of this alive, I can afford to give half of what the sergeant left me.

"I will go alone to the river, and see if the saber still holds the packages on the bottom, for, if it does not, then I have got to look for the mine and find it, for I must keep my pledge to Sergeant Fessenden.

"If I find the package there I will go on to the fort, and report to Buffalo Bill and Colonel Carr.

"If I don't find the package, then I will make a secret hunt for the mine, and when I find it will report at the fort, for I have too much pride to go there and say I have lost the package intrusted to me by the dying sergeant.

"I must find that, or the mine and this man—Gorman Field, he called himself—will help me, if he is true, and, if he plays me false, then we must have it out together.

At any rate, if I leave here, with his aid, I will supply myself from the camp of the outlaws."

At dinner Sherman was well helped by Gorman, and he listened attentively to men talking over the visit of the chief.

Gorman seemed to lead them on, as for the youth's benefit, and he picked up considerable information.

During the afternoon they had some shooting matches, and, allowed to shoot with them, Sherman Canfield proved to be the deadest shot of all, and won their admiration.

They talked together again at supper, about the

chief, their plans for the future, the hold-ups the band had had, and also spoke of their comrades who had gone to look up the gold-hunters, the comrades of Sherman Canfield, while they ended up by stating that their companion who had gone over the plateau to fetch in the horses of Slayback, and the young prisoner would have a hard time of it.

That night Sherman Canfield slept soundly, and the next day he was wondering what his outlaw friend would decide upon.

"Give me another day yet, boy pard," he said, late in the afternoon.

"I haven't quite made up my mind yet."

"All right," cheerily said Sherman, and that night as they sat around the campfire the men began to wonder why their comrade, sent after the horses of the party that had brought Sherman to the stronghold did not come back.

"Two of yer better go over in the morning and hev a look for him," said Gorman, and the next morning a couple of the outlaws made an early start over the plateau.

They were back at noon, and with a story to tell that was not very comforting to hear, for they reported that they had gone down the ropes in the chasm, reconnoitered with their glasses from the cedar bush, and were sure that scouts were lying in wait in the timber, while coyotes about one of the horses showed that he was dead and propped up, while the other animal was staked out.

Their comrade, sent after the horse, had gone down the cliff and had been certainly killed or captured, and this proved that Slayback's party with his prisoner had been tracked that far at least.

Still in irons, though allowed to hobble about near the cabins, Sherman Canfield heard all that was said by the outlaws.

They spoke unreservedly before him, not appearing to take his escaping into consideration, and, from the the past deeds of their chief, apparently looking upon him as already to be numbered among the dead.

He heard with horror their story of going to the camp of his comrades the gold-hunters, pretending to be a rescue party, and thus getting a chance to kill them without danger to themselves.

He looked over the men who had been of that party, led by Slayback, and mentally photographed them, for upon their return, having learned that the chief had been there and intended to put the young prisoner to death, they removed their masks, and those who had remained at the retreat did the same, Gorman among them.

A harder lot of villains Sherman Canfield felt that he had never seen congregated together, though he did except Gorman, yet no other.

All the rest he was assured were bred-in-the-bone devils.

The prisoner was deeply pained at the fate of his



comrades, and, as he lay upon his blanket that night, the tears would come into his eyes.

That Slayback had said Buffalo Bill and his scouts were on the watch for the outlaws, was a great joy to Sherman, but the cool manner in which they took it convinced him that the approach to the retreat must be most secretly hidden, or guarded, as they appeared to dread not the coming of the scouts, only to go ahead and run upon them.

The youth noticed, however, that the outlaws sent out spies the next day, both down the canyon and over the plateau, and seemed anxious for them to come in with their reports.

Some mention was made of a fear that the chief might attempt to come to the retreat and run upon Buffalo Bill and his men, and all seemed to realize what that would mean, desperate and fearless as they knew their leader to be.

Each day had Gorman put Sherman off with the request for more time to consider, until the young prisoner began to feel doubtful of him.

But Gorman still fed him well, and otherwise looked to his comfort, though at other times he seemed to shun being with him.

Sherman could not escape, that was certain, without his aid, and so was compelled to affect a patience he did not feel.

One afternoon one of the two scouts sent over the plateau came in very hastily and a signal was given calling the men at once to assemble.

As soon as he saw him, and he was about the first who did, Sherman made his way to the general rendezvous, and was there when the others came up in haste.

They took no notice of him and at once heard the story of the scout.

It was in effect that they had gone to the plateau and descended into the well-like chasm, when, reaching the little shelf on the side of the cliff where the cedar grew, to their amazement they had beheld Buffalo Bill and his scouts in the meadow.

The chief of scouts was at the base of the cliff, and his men were coming toward him from different directions.

They counted fifteen, including Buffalo Bill, and the latter had said so that they heard him that he intended to lasso the tree on the rocky shelf and see if they could get up that way.

Then they had fled back through a cave which gave them an entrance to the stronghold, and began to climb the ropes, pulling them up after them, though one they had forgotten.

Looking over after they had reached the top, they saw a scout enter the chasm below, and he spied them and was drawing his revolver, when the narrator, who had seized a heavy stone, threw it down and it crushed the man beneath it.

"Then we ran," he continued, "and taking up a position in a hiding place that gave us a view of the mea-

dow, we saw Buffalo Bill sending his men up the side of the cliff."

"Along our trail?" asked Gorman.

"No, almost straight up, and you bet it was a bold thing to do."

"That Buffalo Bill will do anything," said an outlaw.

"Yes, and if he told his men to come they would follow him to Hades."

"Yes, that's so."

"But did they get up?"

"I at once came here to tell you, pards, while Casey remained to watch them from the Crow's Nest, as we call that big rock.

"If they find our trail he will run for camp and notify us, so we can just pick them off one by one, and that will end Buffalo Bill and his band."

"Yas, but they won't come, for they will never think we crosses the Snake's Back Ridge as we does.

"They'll come upon the plateau, and then go back, for they'll never come here," and Gorman's confidence seemed to be shared by all as they talked it over, each one agreeing that if they did come Buffalo Bill and his scouts were doomed.

"There comes Casey now," and at Gorman's word another alarm was felt.

Casey, the outlaw, came along the canyon at a run.

Had he been seen first upon the cliffs above, more anxiety would have been felt, for it would have been certain that Buffalo Bill had trailed them and was coming to the lair along the Snake's Backbone, as the long and narrow ridge was called that connected the plateau with the mountains, and where the slightest false step would hurl one to death on the rocks far below on one side or the other.

In fact, a glance along the Snake's Back gave the appearance of its being split in a number of cases, where such was not really the case, as each of these places could be gotten over with caution, though it did not appear so to the beholder.

When Casey arrived he swung his sombrero around his head and cried:

"They've gone back!"

"They came upon the plateau?"

"You bet they did, and looked over every yard of it."

"Buffalo Bill run his glass along the Snake's Back, but seemed to feel nothing but a bird could take that trail, and the whole lot halted at Blind Canyon, and seemed to feel that was the way we left the plateau, with ropes, for they measured their lariats and found they were not long enough.

"Then, too, they were on the watch and saw that if they did get down we could ambush them, and Buffalo Bill is well aware that our chief can bring over twenty men against him, and even his scouts are not bullet proof.



"So they went back and retreated to the meadow, so I'll give it up and bury their dead comrade, I guess."

"And they can never track us here around the other way," said Gorman.

"You bet they won't."

"I tell you this is the safest hidin' place on 'arth," replied another.

Sherman Canfield made no reply, but took in every word that was uttered.

That the movement of the scouts might not be a blind, Casey was ordered to return with half a dozen outlaws, and go prepared to remain on the plateau all night.

At the same time, in case a double move was intended, there were half a dozen more sent down the canyon to join those who had gone that way in the morning, and all were to be prepared for resistance should Buffalo Bill track them to their lair.

Gorman had given the orders dispatching the outlaws as guards, for, in the absence of Brandon, the outlaw lieutenant, the chief always gave him command of the camp, and both their leaders were then away.

With a dozen men off as guards, there were but few left in camp, and that night Gorman gave a sign to move away from the fire where all sat.

This the young prisoner did by going to his blankets for the night.

Gorman soon after counted the men, saw that none were absent of those left in camp, and he slipped away to the cabin.

He sat down in the door where he could see the men and said, quietly:

"Gone to sleep, boy pard?"

"No, indeed."

"You heard what the men reported?"

"Yes."

"Well, if Buffalo Bill has set out to find this place he'll do it."

"It may not be to-morrow, or next day, or next week or month, but in time he'll get here by some means."

"I have heard that he is not a man to give up, once he starts on a trail."

"That's it, he never does."

"He is like a bloodhound on a trail when he knows he is right, and he'll get here."

"And that means a hot fight?"

"I don't know, for he'll come when we are off our guard, and it means a rope for most of us."

"Well, you all know that you deserve it," was the not very consoling remark of the young prisoner.

"Yes, I guess they do; but you have set me to thinking, and I've got very fond of you, lad."

"I am determined not to be here when Buffalo Bill comes, and I'm going to give you a pledge."

"I am mighty glad of it, Pard Gorman, for I thought you had decided to break your word."

"Oh, no, not that; but I've been thinking, plotting, planning for our good."

"I am going to give you a pledge to stand by you, to join you in the work you said you had to do, but upon conditions."

"Well?"

"They say there is honor among thieves, and I do not wish to have the chief believe I am a traitor to him, that I would set you free, and so I will have you go alone, and I will follow you at a stated time."

"I will give you my pledge to this."

"It's a bargain," was Sherman Canfield's eager response.

"Now, boy pard, let me tell you what I expect of you," said Gorman.

"Fire away."

"A pledge as solemn as the one I make to you."

"Let me hear it."

"First hear my plot for your escape."

"All right."

"I have picked out for you two of the best horses in the outfit, and a fine saddle and bridle, a lariat that belongs to the chief and a Mexican saddle and bridle that can't be beaten."

"Good!"

"Then, too, I have selected for you the best rifle and belt of arms I can find, with ammunition in plenty, along with *serapes* and all you'll need for a camping outfit."

"I'll be fixed away out of sight."

"I wish you to be."

"The lieutenant stopped over in Overland City with a couple of men to get provisions, for you must know some of our men are regarded as honest miners and go about the settlement unsuspected."

"I ordered a big lot of provisions, and when they come to-morrow you shall have a large share put away for you, bacon, coffee, sugar, flour and all else you need."

"You're a dandy, pard."

"I am hungry at the thought of the good things."

"Now, I will have your whole outfit ready for you to-morrow night, for by that time the scare from Buffalo Bill's coming will have blown over, and the chief may be coming soon again."

"I wish to get you away, and I'll take you out of the canyon myself and guide you to a spot from whence I can direct you to where you are to go and wait for me."

"I've got a map here I made, and which you are to keep and study to-morrow."

"I will, but will not my going get you into trouble?"

"No, I will arrange that and I'll tell you how."

"There is one man here whom the chief told me to watch."

"I've done so, and I am sure the first time he gets a chance to go to Overland City he intends to strike for the fort and betray us to Buffalo Bill."

"He dropped a paper the other day and I picked it up and read it."

"It is a map how to come into the canyon, of the sit-



uation of the cabins, the chief's quarters, how many men sleep in each and the number in the band.

"With this is a paper with copies of the reward for the chief's head, dead or alive, so much for each Gold Ghoul, and such a sum for the capture of the outfit.

"I put the paper where I found it, and soon after he came along white as a sheet looking for something and picked it up.

"Now, I told him to-day I wished him to go to Overland City in a few days, on a special mission for the chief, and he seemed delighted at the chance.

"He is the man who will have to suffer for your escape, and I tell you frankly he is robbing the men secretly and making all preparations for getting us hanged."

"So he'll run his neck in the noose himself."

"Exactly."

"Well, sooner or later I do not suppose will matter much; but can you fasten the suspicion on him?"

"I can and will, and there is no man more deserving of death, for, by his own confession he killed his wife and came West, and he is as merciless as a hyena, while he is now plotting to get his comrades hanged, to get rewards for his treachery and is robbing them beforehand."

"Let him hang," was Sherman's complacent rejoinder.

"Now, to-morrow night, instead of coming to bed, slip down along the cliffs and wait for me.

"I'll join you there at the big cedar you have sat under every day."

"I remember."

"I'll unlock your irons and lead you to safety.

"This man, the traitor, will be on duty to-morrow night, for one man has always to remain up, and generally sits by the fire half asleep.

His name is Doyle—the men call him Father Doyle because he shaves clean and looks like a priest."

"I know him."

"I can get back to my blankets unseen, and in the morning will try and keep your escape from being known as long as I can.

"Now you know my plan?"

"Yes, pard Gorman, and it is a dandy one, though a little rough on Doyle."

"He has himself to blame for it."

"All right, it is his funeral."

"Now, boy pard, for my conditions."

"Well?"

"You said you would hunt the sergeant's mine and——"

"And finding it will give you half my share."

"That is all right, but I wish to say that the chief of this band has twice saved my life.

"He saved me once when the Indians were going to burn me at the stake, and again when the miners were going to hang me.

"He is a bad man, and does a great deal of harm,

but I wish to see him come to no trouble through me or my act.

"I wish you to promise me that you will not kill him unless in defense of your own life; that you will not guide Buffalo Bill to catch, or kill him, whatever you may do for the rest of the band, and, if you discover him as he is that you will not betray him.

"Do this and you go free, and within a week I will join you and we will be pardes together.

"Refuse my request regarding the chief, and I will say frankly I will not help you."

"I appreciate your motive, Pard Gorman, and accept your conditions, so give you my pledge," was the earnest response.

"Then it is a compact."

"Now go to sleep and get a good night's rest," and Gorman returned to the group at the fire, leaving Sherman Canfield in a very pleasant frame of mind.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE ESCAPE.

The next morning Sherman Canfield arose with a deep feeling of anxiety, though he had, young as he was, learned the Indian trait of completely hiding his feelings.

He ate a good breakfast, listened to the talk of the outlaws, and hobbled about near the cabins, going to the large cedar a hundred yards away, where he had found comfort in lying upon the straw at the base and thinking.

Then would form itself upon his mind the dread of the chief's coming that day, the fear that the scouts might make an attack, and Buffalo Bill meet with defeat, perhaps death.

Then there loomed up before him the fear that Gorman's plot might fail, until at last he muttered:

"What a fool I am to lie here borrowing trouble when I've got more than I want now.

"I'll not worry, but wait and take my chances."

Just then he saw Doyle passing down the canyon toward the spring, carrying two buckets.

The man saw him, nodded, went on after the water and, leaving it by Gorman's campfire, came over and sat down on the cedar straw near him.

"Say, young pard, I guesses you is gettin' pretty tired o' prisoner life," he said.

"You bet I am."

"I believe you knows where Sergeant Fessenden has a mine."

"They say I do."

"I guesses you does, for you was with him when he croaked, and he didn't go without tellin' you."

"He told me a great deal about his family."

"And his gold, too, I'll bet on it."

"Suppose he did?"

"Waal, I'm on ther make I am, and I don't care who dies or lives so I gits gold, and I feels sorry for you



and wants ter help yer, so if you will divvy with me I'll git yer out of this and make no mistake."

"How can you do it?"

"Never mind how, but jist write me a leetle paper giving me half an interest in your mine, in case you is let free out of this by me."

"Suppose I have no mine?"

"I'll take chances on that."

"All right, give me a pencil and some paper."

"No, I'll smuggle out here to you pen, ink and paper, and you write it."

The man departed but soon returned with paper, ink and a pen, and Sherman wrote as dictated, to give him a "divvy," as the outlaw called it, in the gold mine he was then the owner of.

Doyle tucked the paper away and returned with the writing materials to the cabin, and the youth smiled grimly at having the man show his hand so quickly and verify the statement of Gorman.

About noon the guards from both on the plateau and down the canyon came in, and they reported that Buffalo Bill had buried the dead scout in the timber where they were encamped and then departed.

There was another grave there which the outlaws had unearthed and in it had found their comrade who had been sent after the two horses left by Slayback in the meadow.

"That evens it up, the killin' of a scout," said Slayback, and the outlaws all set it down that their companion killed by Buffalo Bill had been avenged by the death of the scout killed in the chasm with a stone.

"I only wishes we could avenge each one of our pards as easy," said one of the outlaws, and his sentiments were unanimously concurred in, while Casey remarked with a cruel leer at Sherman:

"Waal, when ther chief comes, I guess there'll be another offset for our pards kilt, by hangin' ther youngster."

"You just come to see me hanged and you'll know how you'll look when Buffalo Bill strings you up," sharply said Sherman, and the laugh was on Casey, who at once arose, intending to strike the youth, when Gorman sprung between and said:

"That boy is the chief's prisoner, Casey, and if you touch him I'll knife yer."

Gorman was a man to be feared when aroused, and his great strength was well known, and Casey had no desire to face him in a fight with any weapons.

He saw, too, that the outlaws were with Gorman for protecting the boy, as several called out:

"You began it, Casey, so let up."

"Waal, I don't want no trouble with ther chief, you bet, so you escapes, youngster, and I advise you to keep yer mouth shut."

Sherman laughed and replied:

"You talk big to a boy who is a prisoner and in irons, but sneak off when a man faces you."

Casey caught Gorman's eye and got up and walked

away and the breeze that threatened to be a storm blew over.

The day seemed a long and weary one to Sherman Canfield, but at last the shadows lengthened, the canyon was cast in gloom and night fell.

The campfires were built and supper was soon ready, after which the men sat around smoking their pipes and talking, as was their wont.

"I'm on watch to-night, but I'm gittin' all fixed fer you and me, and you'll have ther fun o' seein' Casey hung, I guess," whispered Doyle to the prisoner, as he got up and went toward his cabin.

But he did not stay long inside, watching to see that all the men were around the several fires, all except Gorman, who was not visible.

Knowing that the light of the two fires kept the men from seeing back in the darkness, Sherman slipped out of the cabin, having arranged his blankets to look as though he was in them.

He went back of the cabins, along the base of the cliffs, and halted in the shadow of the cedars there.

Gorman was already there, and he said in a whisper:

"I will unlock your irons—then follow this cliff along for a quarter of a mile until you come to a small canyon, which enter, and at the mouth of it, a hundred yards away, you will find two horses and your outfit.

"Put the pack-saddle on one, your riding-saddle on the other and wait there for me to come."

"I understand," whispered Sherman, and picking up his manacles, which he said he wished to carry along as a souvenir, he went slowly along under the shadow of the cliff.

He found the canyon, and at its head the horses, and even in the darkness he saw that they were splendid animals.

He was also delighted with the outfit, as far as he could see, and had his horse saddled and weapons in hand when a horseman rode into the canyon.

It was Gorman, and he said quickly:

"Come, boy pard, for we have a long ride and I must be back before dawn."

He led the way down the canyon, and after a couple of miles came to a narrow chasm in a cliff, which they passed through, coming out into a broad, shallow stream beyond.

The chasm in the cliff which Gorman led the way through was a very narrow one, scarcely five feet in width, and the walls on either side towered hundreds of feet above the heads of the riders.

Here and there the cliff met above, from large pieces of rock breaking off and becoming chucked in between the walls in their descent.

Scrub cedars and pines grew in the crevices of the canyon, and on the side of which formed the bank of the stream the whole ridge was thickly covered with an undergrowth which completely concealed the chasm, causing it to look solid.

The stream was a broad one and shallow, and riding



into it, Gorman turned down it, the water coming up to the stirrups.

He held on in the water for several miles, when the other shore began to look less black and dismal, and crossing, the depth almost lifting the horses off their feet, they came out at a regular trail where wild animals sought a drinking place, and which was also a crossing place for Indians on their hunts, when they sought the country lying beyond for big game.

Once out of the stream, Gorman led the way at a gallop, and this was kept up for miles, not a word being said between them.

At last he came to a halt, and said:

"Do you see anything familiar about you?"

"Well, yes, I have passed here before."

"You did on your way to Overland City."

"The country where the Gold Ghouls' retreat is all supposed to be impassable, almost to the foot of man, and yet you have seen that it is not."

"Yonder mountain you see is in just another such a country, and there will be your retreat until I join you."

"Keep on for the mountain and halt until daylight when you get near it."

"Then consult your map and follow its directions, and you will find a retreat as safe as the one you have been a prisoner in."

"Look for me in a week or ten days, and make yourself comfortable until I come."

"Do you see this horse I am riding?"

"Yes."

"It is Doyle's favorite animal, and will add another link to the chain of evidence against him."

"Let me tell you that he came to me and had a talk."

"What did he say?"

"He told me he would aid my escape and got me to give him a paper giving him half-interest in my mine, wherever that may be."

"You did so."

"Of course."

"Good! it will be found on him, and that will be another evidence against him."

"Ah! I had not thought of that—so it will."

"And I'll see that the key that unlocks your irons is found in his pocket when he is searched."

"It looks as though Doyle was as good as hanged."

"He is; but I must be off."

"Should luck go against me and I do not come to you, you are free at least."

"Yes, and I can never forget what you have done for me, Mr. Gorman."

"Nor what you have done for me, for the sight of you, my boy, recalled me to myself, and has made a new man of me."

"I will not say good-by, but good-night," and with a firm grasp of the hand Gorman leaped into his saddle and dashed away, soon disappearing in the darkness.

For a few minutes Sherman Canfield stood like one dazed.

Never in his life before had he seemed so utterly alone in the world.

At last the thought came over him that he was free.

He was no longer a captive to the merciless Gold Ghouls.

He had two splendid horses, a pack with food, ammunition and blankets in plenty.

He was splendidly armed, and the morning would reveal to him that there was a safe retreat for him.

He gained his spirits quickly, and mounting, took the mountain peak as his beacon of hope and rode on.

It seemed to grow no nearer for a long while, but at last he reached the foothills and he came to a halt.

He would rest until dawn.

This he did, unsaddling his horses and staking them out.

He was quickly asleep and the sun shining in his face awoke him.

Recalling all that the night had brought for him, he arose quickly, bundled up his blankets, took a bath in the stream near and ate a cold breakfast from the haversack Gorman had hung to his saddle.

Then in the broad daylight he had a look at his horses and his outfit, and was delighted with everything.

"Why, I am rich," he said, with a pleased look breaking over his face.

Then he got out the map, and after studying it found just where he was, and mounting, pressed on.

The trail led him, following the map's directions, by a way that he felt very sure he could not be tracked or discovered, and at noon he came to the end of his journey, a little valley in the very summit of the mountain, with grass, wood and water in plenty, and what was more, a small log cabin.

He had reached the goal he had started for.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE SCOUT'S DREAM.

Buffalo Bill returned to the fort in no enviable mood, after his failure to track the outlaws to their retreat.

He had to confess that he was baffled, and that to capture the outlaw band he must try strategy.

He rode back into the fort in a gloomy mood and at once sought headquarters, where he told the colonel his story.

"Now, there are several men in Overland City whom I have suspected of being the outlaw chief, and it is just that I intend to find out," he said.

"Who are they?" said the colonel.

"One of them, Colonel Carr, is Death Notch Dick, whom I laid up for repairs for a while."

"Just the man to suspect, too."

"He is, sir, for he is playing a part I am sure, and



in spite of his boasted pluck cried for his life when I had him at a vantage; but I will soon know about him."

"And there are others you suspect?"

"Yes, sir; the man they call Golden George, the Gambler."

"I have heard of him."

"He is a dashing fellow in his way, sir, lives by cards, and has a very strong following of men who do not work for a living."

"He may not go in the field as chief, but he still might be the head imp to plot, plan and order, and I shall keep my eye on him to see what he does do when not gambling."

"Is there another you suspect of being the leader?"

"Yes, sir, there is."

"It is some one you do not care to name?"

"I would not wish to, sir, save to you, and, in fact, all are simply under my suspicion, as the Gold Ghouls chief keeps so completely unknown and yet appears to know all that goes on, just when to strike a coach with money aboard, or make a raid that will pay. To be so posted he either lives in Overland City, or has spies there who are men who keep him well informed. If I can hit upon the chief, all will be well, and if I can rope in a spy it will lead to the wiping out of the band, but to attempt to catch them by force, I do not see how it can be done unless we catch them in a body at their deviltry, sir, and push them to the end of the trail."

"That is just my way of looking at it, Buffalo Bill, and I will be glad to have you go about the capture of these outlaws in your own way."

"Thank you, sir, I will endeavor to render a good report in time, for it cannot be quickly done, save by a lucky accident."

"There is no hurry; but now as to this third person you have under suspicion?"

"You know of Montebello, the Mexican, sir?"

"Who does not in this country?"

"He is the one I suspect, colonel."

Colonel Carr looked both surprised and pained, and said reproachfully:

"But, Cody, Don Montebello is a Mexican *caballero* of great wealth, of splendid family, was an officer in the Mexican service, and is a royally good fellow, generous to a fault, brave, and has many friends among the officers at the fort."

"I know all that he is, colonel, openly, but I am not so sure that he does not live a double life, as many others do."

"You have some reason for saying this?"

"Really, Colonel Carr, I have nothing more than a suspicion that originated in a dream."

"In a dream?"

"Yes, sir, and, strange to say, I have had a dream in which he figured no less than three times."

"What was the dream, Cody?"

"First, sir, I dreamed that I was fired at from ambush, and the bullet proved fatal."

"As I lay upon the ground, Don Montebello came up and told me that he had fired the shot."

"My second dream was that we had captured the masked Gold Ghouls, and when I unmasked the chief, it was Don Montebello."

"The third dream was a few nights ago, when my old pard, Tom Taylor, whom the Gold Ghouls killed, appeared to me and said:

"Don Montebello is your man to hang, and that ends the Gold Ghouls."

In spite of himself, Colonel Carr was impressed by the earnest manner in which Buffalo Bill told his dream, and after a moment's thought, said:

"Well, Cody, dreams are strange things, and it is hard to understand them."

"That you should three times have such a dream, with no thought against Don Montebello before, I cannot comprehend, and yet it is hard to condemn a man on a dream. What is your plan of action?"

"I would like to carry an official envelope on each coach, sir, to Overland City, and go after one from the return coach, colonel."

"But there may be no dispatches to send, Cody, oftener than once a month."

"That is where I wished to ask your help, sir, to have your adjutant write several each week, bogus ones, addressed to the adjutant of Fort Douglass, who must be posted to send back dispatches weekly."

"This will give me an excuse to go into the settlement twice a week, and I'll manage to stay a while each time, gamble a little, pretend to spree considerably and have chats with the boys."

"In other words, Cody, as the detectives say, you intend to shadow the Gold Ghouls to their doom."

"That is just it, sir, and I believe we can do it with your kind aid."

"Take the fort, Cody," said the colonel with a smile, "if you need it; but candidly, I believe you are on the right track, that you are pushing strong in the direction to win, and do not hesitate to make what demands on me that you need, and I will promptly meet them."

"I know that, Colonel Carr, and thank you, sir."

"I will send for the adjutant and have him write at once to Fort Douglass and request dispatches—if bogus—by each coach and to look for others from Rattle, and, in case they might be captured by Gold Ghouls, it would be well to have them appear genuine."

"A splendid idea, sir."

"Now, I will go and pick out the two scouts who are to be in my secret, to go in my place at times, and I have an idea, sir, of pretending to let one man go, so he can go to the mines and hunt work, for he can do a great deal by being constantly on the scene, and I will have Dr. Dillon, too, as an ally."

"Cody, you are going about this like a general preparing his plan of campaign, and it cannot fail," said the colonel, with considerable enthusiasm.

The adjutant was sent for, and after some further



conversation with the two officers, Buffalo Bill took his leave and went to his own quarters.

There, flying at half mast over the cabin of the chief of scouts, was his own flag.

It was an embroidered field, representing a prairie, in the midst of which was a buffalo, on the side of which was branded the name:

"BILL,"

while in the distance were a band of mounted scouts coming at full speed toward the buffalo.

Calling to one of his men, Buffalo Bill said:

"Sit down, Ernest, for I wish to have a talk with you.

"You were a miner before you took to scouting, I believe?"

"I was a guide in Texas, sir, and ranger, guided a party of miners up into Colorado and then went to mining, but gave it up to come with you."

"Well, Ernest, I wish you to go back to mining again."

"Oh, chief! do I not suit you?" cried Ernest Ames, quickly and excitedly.

"You do, and that is just why I wish you to turn miner, to go to Overland City, buy you an outfit, and set to work, and at the same time shadow three men, trying also to find out who are Gold Ghouls and who are their spies and connected with them."

"Oh, yes, sir, I'll turn miner with pleasure," said Ernest, with a smile.

"Now go and fetch Baldy Benson here and Jack Hardy, and I'll tell you a game I am going to play to win, and which you have got to hold hands in, and play only trump cards."

Ernest Ames hastily departed, but was soon back with Jack Hardy and Baldy Benson, three as fine specimens of manhood as one would wish to meet.

They heard the chief's plan of action, were told to breathe it to no one, not even the other scouts, and when Jack and Baldy went to Overland City as couriers, what their duties were to be, while Ernest was to go at once and begin mining, or, in other words, play the detective.

## CHAPTER VII.

### DON MONTEBELLO THE GOLD KING.

The stage coach began on its weekly runs out of Overland City a few days after the talk Buffalo Bill had with Colonel Carr, and the turning three of his men into scout shadows, to ferret out who the Gold Ghouls were.

The coach was to leave Overland City at nine o'clock, taking the mail that came from the camps, settlement and fort, and Buffalo Bill was sent with the little batch of dispatches to go through eastward, for the fort mail was sent the evening before by a regular rider.

Going along at a swift canter, as he neared the long up-hill trail leading to Overland City, his little batch of dispatches stuck in his belt, Buffalo Bill drew rein as he came to a steep ascent to give his horse a minute's rest.

As he did so he saw a horseman coming toward him down the trail.

"Well, he's a dandy for looks," muttered the scout, and he meant it, for the horseman was indeed one to see and remember.

Horse and man were alike in their bearing, which was haughty and magnificent.

The horse was a long-bodied, clean-limbed stallion, as black as jet, with an embroidered bridle and massive silver bit, while a breast-strap was also embroidered and ornamented with silver.

The saddle was a most gorgeous affair, with housings embroidered, and studded with silver, even the stirrups being of the same precious metal.

With long, flowing mane and tail, the splendid animal stepped along as though he bore an emperor upon his back.

But the rider!

He was a man of splendid physique, six feet in height, broad-shouldered, straight as an arrow, sat in the saddle with the air of one who knew his power and held his head up with a haughty air of conscious dignity and importance.

He was dressed in a velvet jacket of the Mexican pattern, embroidered with gold lace and ornamented with solid gold buttons.

His pants were of snow-white broadcloth, fitting close, and stuck in enameled boot-tops that came above his knees and were armed with massive gold spurs.

He wore a white silk shirt, with a scarf knotted under the large collar that was turned over his jacket, and in a broad, embroidered belt about his waist, upon either side, was thrust, without holster, a large revolver, gold mounted.

Upon his head was a broad-brimmed, soft sombrero, turned up in a rakish manner, and encircled by a gold chain, to the end of which hung a miniature gold revolver and dagger as ornaments.

And the face?

It was darkly bronzed, betokening the Mexican race, and every feature was cast in a perfect mold.

He wore a full black beard, the ends of his long mustache curling upward, and his eyes were large and full of expression, a slumbering fire seeming to dwell back in their dark depths.

One odd part of his costume was that he wore a silk handkerchief like a cap bound about his head, and of the brightest hues of yellow, scarlet and blue, his hat fitting over it and set upon one side.

Such was this remarkable man in appearance as he rode toward Buffalo Bill, who muttered to himself:

"He looks, indeed, the Gold King they call him."



And this was the man who had come under the suspicion of Buffalo Bill through a dream!

He was a Mexican, he said, a man of rank and riches, and he had come to the mines to look after interests he held there, and he was known to hold many shares in claims and employ a number of men.

He was generous, and in spite of his haughty appearance, was ever courteous to all, and had a genial word for the meanest man in the mines.

A popular man he was, too, and he had become a favorite in the settlement, at the fort and the ranches, while he lived on a ranch of his own a mile from Overland City.

He had proven himself fully able to take care of himself when attacked or insulted, yet never sought trouble, and when he gambled it was for amusement, as he always insisted upon paying money back won from a poor man, and if this was refused it was spent in treating the crowd.

If he found any one to play for a large sum he would never flinch if he lost heavily, and seemed never to have his temper ruffled in the slightest.

"Ho, Chief Buffalo Bill, I am glad to meet you.

"I am just on my way to the fort to dine with Captain Detrick.

"You are well, I hope?"

He spoke in a richly-toned voice, yet with a marked Mexican accent, and his smile revealed two rows of milk-white teeth.

"Thank you, Don Montebello, I am well, and Captain Detrick hailed me as I came away and asked me to tell you, if I saw you, not to forget your promise for to-day."

"I could never forget a pleasure in store, but let me congratulate you upon your punishment of that man Death Notch Dick the other day—they say it was grand."

"He forced it upon himself, sir."

"Yes, and I hope we will have no more of the Ranger Regulators now."

"Or the Gold Ghouls, for they are becoming more and more dangerous."

"Yes, it is so, and to be regretted; but some day you will run them down, I hope," and with a courteous salute, Don Montebello, the Gold King, rode on, while Buffalo Bill muttered:

"And that is the man my dream causes me to suspect."

Buffalo Bill reached Overland City after meeting Don Montebello, in ample time for the outgoing stage, and he handed his dispatches into the driver's hands with the remark that they were important.

A number of miners and others had gathered to see the stage depart, and they saw the chief of scouts deliver the dispatches and heard his words.

Death Notch Dick was there, his arms in a sling, which had been broken in a previous fight he had with

Bill, and going up to him Buffalo Bill asked in a kindly way how he was.

"All right, pard.

"I'll be well afore long, and I don't hold any hard feelin' ag'in you in the least."

"It is very kind of you, Death Notch Dick; but as I did the work, I'll pay the doctor.

"Where is he to be found?"

"I guess he's at his cabin, for he's livin' in Overland now.

"But what was the matter you dismissed Scout Ernest from yer band, Bill?"

"I didn't dismiss him, for he was a good man."

"He's left you."

"Yes, the pay of a scout is not enough to get rich on, you know, and Ernest was an old miner, so wanted to go back to gold digging again, and I had to give him up."

"Waal, he'll do well, for he's already struck it rich."

"No!"

"Yes, he came here and bought the old deserted Bad Luck Mine, payin' only a few dollars for it, for nobody wanted it, and that's how I know'd he were here, when they told me he got ter work four days ago and struck payin' dirt the very next day."

"Well, I am glad to hear it, for he deserves good luck.

"I'll drop in and congratulate him on his good fortune," and Buffalo Bill mounted his horse and rode away.

He went to the cabin of Dr. Dillon and found that gentleman at home.

He had a very large and comfortable cabin, using one room for his office, another as his bedroom and a third for his kitchen and eating-room.

A Chinaman whom he called Ding-Dong was his servant and was as shrewd an individual as ever smoked opium, though he had an expression of holiness upon his face that would have fitted well a Methodist deacon.

The doctor welcomed the scout warmly, ordered Ding-Dong to bring some glasses and cigars, and remarked:

"What do you think of my John Chinaman?"

"He's a dandy."

"You are right. Ding-Dong is a dandy. He's cunning as a fox, professes the innocence of a lamb, has a temper like a tiger, and wears under that blouse of his no less than four revolvers and two knives.

"I saved him from being hanged by a mob once, and again kept him from dying when he got poisoned, and he swears by me, and is as true as steel, while he generally hates every other man in Overland City; but is there any news?"

"Some, which I will tell you, and I have come to find out what you know?"

"I believe Death Notch Dick is about as black a villain as I know, and you must look out for him."



"I will."

"Ding-Dong is going to help me in some ferret work for you, Bill, and no one would be better."

"I guess you are right, for you can trust him, with the hold on him that you have."

Buffalo Bill then made known his scheme to shadow certain men in the camp, and Dr. Dillon promised him his help.

Then the scout went on the search for Ernest Ames, and found him in his mine, and alone.

"I hear you have struck it rich already, Ernest."

"I struck a lot in a bag, several hundreds, chief, that some poor fellow had hidden away and then got killed I suppose; but it pays well, and I may pick up more."

"I hope so; but any news?"

"Nothing to tie to yet, sir, but I am on the alert."

"So is Dr. Dillon and his Chinese servant, and we'll strike it rich yet, I feel."

"I met Montebello to-day, and saw Death Notch, but have not yet run across Golden George."

"He's away now, chief; but I'll trust none of them, and you look out for Death Notch," was Ernest Ames' parting advice to Buffalo Bill.

Buffalo Bill spent an hour or two in Overland City, after leaving Ernest Ames, in idling about the tavern and the saloons.

He saw Death Notch Dick again, and had another talk with him, and, after dinner at the tavern, mounted his horse and started upon the return trail to Fort Ratler.

He did not ride very fast, and was going quietly along the rocky trail, near the spot where he had so opportunely arrived upon the scene in time to save Sherman Canfield from the Ranger Regulators, when he was surprised to see drop before him, from on top of a high cliff near, a stone to which was tied a slip of paper.

He at once dismounted and picked it up.

Without breaking it loose from the rock, he unfolded the paper, and read:

"Do not return by the trail you came.

"You are fearless, I know, but no courage will avail against a coward foe in ambush.

"If you value your life, take another trail back to the fort, for not very far from here deadly enemies are in hiding to kill you.

"YOUR UNKNOWN SHADOWER."

"Well, who wrote this, and is it a bluff, a blind or the truth?" said the scout, when he had read it.

He looked upward, and saw only the cedar-fringed cliff towering hundreds of feet above him.

The stone and its warning had certainly come from off the cliff.

The stone was a small one, a string was tied to it, and then around the warning.

The latter was written in a distinct hand, with pencil, and on half a sheet of note-paper.

Buffalo Bill did not remember to have ever seen the writing before.

To reach the top of the cliff he would have to ride back a mile and ascend a trail there that meant another mile to the spot from whence the stone had been thrown.

By the time he reached there the one who had warned him could have over two miles the start of him.

It was doubtful, too, if he would leave any trail in the hard soil on top of the cliff. If he was not mounted, he certainly would not.

So argued the scout. Then he asked himself if he should heed the warning.

At first he decided that it seemed to have been written in good faith, and it was best for him to do so, for, as the one who had warned him very truly said, what could a brave man do against a coward in ambush?

Then came the thought to the scout that the outgoing stage traveled that trail for fully a mile further, and something might have happened to that which it was wished to cover up.

If he took another trail to the fort, he would have to turn off on a trail not a quarter of a mile ahead, and, if anything had gone wrong with the coach, he would not know it.

So, all things considered, he decided to go on as he had started.

He remembered the warning to keep his eye on Death Notch Dick, but then he had left him back in Overland City.

He thought then, strange to say, of Don Montebello, the gold king, who had gone on to the fort.

Then his mind turned upon Golden George, the gambler, whom he remembered Scout Ernest had said was just then away from Overland City.

Reading over the warning again, he thrust it and the stone into his pocket, and his mind was made up as to what he would do.

He had sat upon his horse undecided for several minutes, but he would hesitate no longer.

He would go on, and by the trail he had been so mysteriously warned he must not take, as death lurked there for him.

Looking to his revolvers, and with his rifle across his saddle, he glanced up at the cliff, saw no one, and rode on.

He had disregarded the mysterious warning.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### AN UNKNOWN FRIEND.

Buffalo Bill, though he determined to take chances, went along with a full realization that he must be ready to meet any danger there was.

He felt that he was taking his life in his hands, and he did so without fear of result, once he made up his mind, for, if death came through it, he would meet it as bravely as man should.



His horse was a splendid animal, for he rode no other kind, and long association with the chief of the scouts had made him like his master, sensitive to danger and watchful in a wonderful degree.

"Keep your eyes and ears open, old fellow, for we may be fired upon."

"Watch for 'em sharp," said the scout, speaking as though to a hunting dog, and the horse seemed to understand the warning, and at once picked up his heels.

There was something in the falling stone and fluttering paper, the halt of the scout, and then cautious advance, which the horse seemed to have instinctively set down as a warning, and he now moved forward with light tread, watchful eyes, and ears set for the slightest sound.

So horse and rider went on to face the ordeal they had been warned lay in their path.

After a quarter of a mile the scout came to where he could turn off on another, though longer, trail to the right.

He went calmly by.

Another quarter of a mile and he beheld ahead of him the very spot for an ambush.

It was a pass between groups of rocks, covered with lichen, a kind of natural gateway between, though a natural breastwork, for it was thrown up like a fortification there.

Upon one side the line of piled-up rocks, overgrown with cedars, ran to the edge of the river, the same in which Sherman Canfield had left the sergeant's pack-trail.

On the other side the cedar-grown rocks ran to the high line of cliffs along which the trail led at the base. Buffalo Bill was within three hundred yards of the spot when his eye took in its position for an ambush.

"If there is an ambush, it is right there," he muttered, and then settled himself more firmly in the saddle and grasped his rifle with ready grip.

Nearer and nearer he approached until he got within a hundred feet of the rocks, when suddenly there was a sharp report, followed quickly by another and a yell of triumph.

But the shot had not come from the rocks, but above. The quick glance upward of the scout had revealed a puff of smoke over the edge of the cliff, and just behind the line of rocks in the trail.

There the shots had come from.

In an instant Buffalo Bill was ready for battle, and spurred forward toward the rocks.

As he did so, he saw a form running at full speed, and a look backward revealed that the face was masked.

He was running toward the river, where two horses were now seen by the scout, as he passed through the break in the rocks.

Instantly his rifle was at his shoulder, his horse came to a sudden halt, and Buffalo Bill fired at the masked

outlaw who had turned quickly to pull trigger upon the scout.

But Buffalo Bill was the quickest, and the outlaw went down, his rifle being discharged as he fell.

Then the scout looked about him, and there, right behind the barrier, not thirty feet from him, lay another dead man.

He, too, wore a mask.

Riding up to him, the scout saw that he had a bullet wound in the top of his head, at the back.

He had never known what killed him.

He had been kneeling among the rocks, his rifle resting in a gap before him, and he lay upon his face, his hands yet grasping the weapon, which was cocked, the forefinger almost touching the trigger.

Then Buffalo Bill glanced upward.

No one was visible on the cliff, and the two puffs of smoke had floated away.

The scout rode to the second body, that of the man he had killed.

There was a wound in his back, besides the bullet he had sent through his head.

That accounted for the second shot from the cliff and the yell of pain.

"Hello! Hello!" shouted the scout, looking up toward the cliff.

No response came.

He took off his sombrero and waved it.

No one answered the signal.

Again he called, and said:

"Ho, pard, show yourself, that I may see who it is that has saved my life."

"I did not heed your warning, and but for you I would now be as dead as this fellow at my feet."

Still no reply.

The top of the cliff was nearly five hundred feet above the scout, and to reach there, even on foot, he would have to go a couple of miles in either direction.

He knew that the one who had warned him, seeing that he had not heeded it, had gone along the top of the cliff and fired upon the outlaws in ambush before they could fire upon him.

Hearing the rapid approach of hoofs, Buffalo Bill turned to see who was coming.

The one who came into view Buffalo Bill recognized at a glance.

It was Don Montebello, the gold king.

"Ah, Cody, we meet again— What, a dead man!" he cried, as his eyes fell upon the body on the rocks.

Buffalo Bill silently pointed to the other outlaw.

"What, another?"

"Two of them, Don, and two of a kind."

"Who are they?"

"Their masks show."

"I have not yet looked at their faces, but will do so now, and maybe we will recognize them."

"How could we recognize them, Cody?"



"Might have seen them in Overland City, when they did not consider it necessary to wear masks, Don."

"Very true; but how did it occur, for I heard two quick shots, then two more, so spurred on."

"Oh, simply an attempt to ambush and kill me, Don."

"To kill you, Buffalo Bill?"

"Oh, yes; there is nothing strange in that, for I am threatened all the time, and did not some good angel protect me, I would have been killed hundreds of times."

"And you killed them both after they fired and missed you?"

"Oh, no, Don; I was riding into their trap, when my good angel aloft shot one and wounded the other as he skipped away."

"The shots put me on my guard, and I got a bead on that fellow over there as he turned to fire on me—see?"

"Yes; I congratulate you, too, Senor Cody, on your narrow escape, only I don't understand about your good angel."

"That I do not understand myself, Don; but some one warned me by killing this man, and who my unknown protector is I do not know."

"Ah, Cody, you must know. You have a secret bodyguard."

"See here, Don Montebello, no matter what men have said of me in my life, there are two things I have never been accused of, and they are cowardice and being a thief, and I could as soon be one as the other. Please do not insinuate that I take men along secretly to protect me, for I would brand the lie very quickly."

"My dear senor, I made no such charge, only saying that you must have some guard, for this being protected by an unknown foe is a most remarkable coincidence."

"You and I want no quarrel, Senor Cody, for my words were not meant to offend, as when I give an insult it is too pointed to misunderstand."

"All right, Don; I regret mistaking your meaning; but the fact remains that but for some one, who fired from yonder cliff, I would have been a dead man now."

"See, this bullet entered the back and top of this man's head, and the bullet in the back of yonder man plowed downward, too, I will wager, showing that both shots came from above."

"I haled and called, but got no reply, so who my protector is I am utterly ignorant of, but I thank him with all my heart."

"Most certainly."

"Now to see if I have met these two gentlemen before."

He dismounted as he spoke, turned the body over gently, as though he held no ill will against the dead, and then removed the mask, the Don looking on the while with deepest attention.

"Yes, I have seen this man before, but do not know him."

"I do not recall his face, either, but I have certainly seen him," said the Don.

Then they went over to the second body, and he, too, was unmasked.

"I know this man, for he used to be a miner, and was known as Casey," said Buffalo Bill.

"Yes, he worked for me a year ago," the Don said and added:

"Now, what is to be done, Cody?"

"Don Montebello, you are going to Overland City"

"Yes."

"Will you kindly report the affair to Dr. Dillon, and have him send out a party to bury them, while I wait here; and yet, before you leave, I would like to have you see me search the bodies."

"Certainly."

Buffalo Bill did search the bodies, finding, besides their weapons, a belt containing money and jewelry of various kinds, which revealed their trade as roving agents.

In a thicket, close to the water's edge, were found their two horses, hitched, and they had an outfit for camping fastened to their saddles.

"Don Montebello, to the victor belong the spoils, I suppose, so I will turn this money and jewelry over to you, asking you to place it for the good of poor and sick miners in Overland City, while the horses and their outfit, I will put in for the good of my scouts."

"A fair division, surely, Senor Cody, and I accept your commission, and will see that the money reaches the most deserving, in your name."

"I will also send help to you at once," and, with salute, Montebello, the gold king, rode away, leaving Buffalo Bill alone with the dead.

## CHAPTER IX.

### KEPT A SECRET.

"Now, what am I to think?"

"Is Montebello guilty or not guilty?"

"He was strangely near this scene of ambush set for me."

"One of these men, he says, worked for him, and I am not mistaken, the other did, too."

"He made me hot when he insinuated I was protected by a secret bodyguard."

"Now, who on earth, or up in the sky, is my protector?"

"I give it up; but it is some one who does not want to be known."

"A man who has done what he has needed not be afraid of showing his face anywhere."

"I could forgive an outlaw for that act."

"This will astonish the colonel, but please him, I know that two more of the masked Gold Ghouls have gone to the land of fireworks."



In the future, if I get another warning, I will heed it too quick.

That fellow had a bead on me when he was shot, the other was to chip in a bullet if I didn't drop it.

But the shots from above scared one to death, and the other off with a tear down his back that looks like," and thus musing, after the departure of Don Montebello, the gold king, Buffalo Bill drew off the skirt of the man he had shot, revealing the gash of a cut from the shoulder to the waist, down the back, proving conclusively that the bullet had come from above over the man.

The scout paced to and fro, while his horse cropped grass, for an hour or more, and then voices were heard as a party of horsemen dashed into view.

Dr. Dillon was along, and a score of others, and they all heard the story from the Don.

Doctor, I'll leave the bodies with you, for I will go to the fort," said Buffalo Bill, with a significant look at the doctor, and, as he shook hands with him, he gave a note in the hands of the physician which told the story as he knew it, with the meaning and all, and ended with:

Keep your eye on the Don."

Mounting his horse, and taking the animals of the party in lead, Buffalo Bill went on at a gallop along the trail.

When at last he came to a place where a trail led up to the top of the ridge, he hid the outlaws' horses, and went on up.

Reaching the summit, he went rapidly along the ridge back toward the spot where his unknown opponent had fired from, and, arriving near, he dismounted and continued on foot.

The party had thrown the bodies across the backs of the horses, and returned to Overland City, so the scout once began a thorough search.

But not a trail of horse or man was visible anywhere.

Only where the one had fired the shots was a stone wall displaced recently, but nothing else.

An hour's search revealed no more, so, returning to his horse, Buffalo Bill went on his way, taking the outlaws' horses in lead, as before.

He rode rapidly, but it was sunset as he reached the fort, and, coming in with two led and riderless horses, in every one was out, created a sensation.

"Where did you get them, Bill?" called out the officer of the day, and Buffalo Bill's reply was a significant and silent one, as he held up the two masks he had taken from the faces of the outlaws, and which caused the officer to call out:

Good for you, Cody!

That means three less."

On going to Colonel Carr's quarters, Buffalo Bill found the officer seated on a rustic bench under a tree, and called to him to join him there.

"Whose horses have you, Cody?"

"Gold Ghouls', sir."

"And the riders?"

"Here are their scalps, sir."

The colonel looked up in a startled way, but, beholding the masks, took them and looked them over carefully, while he said:

"You have three now?"

"Yes, sir."

"How did it happen?"

"In a most unlooked for way, sir."

"Are you hurt?"

"Not at all, sir, though I had as close a shave, Colonel Carr, as I ever had in my life."

"Tell me about it."

"Pardon me, sir, if I first ask you if Don Montebello, the gold king, was here to-day?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Will you kindly let your orderly go to see if he visited Captain Detrick at the fort to-day?"

"Certainly."

The orderly was dispatched on his errand, to return with the information that Don Montebello had not been at the fort to see Captain Detrick that day, nor had that officer seen him.

"Why do you ask, Cody?"

"I met the Don, sir, just out of Overland City this morning, and Captain Detrick had told me to say to him he was expecting him to dinner, and he said he was coming here.

"I met him again this afternoon, a few miles out of Overland, and just after I had very nearly lost my life at the hands of men who wore these two masks, and it seemed a coincidence, sir."

"It seems strange, though the Don might have been detained elsewhere in one of his claims; but now tell me your story."

The story was told, from the delivery of the dispatches to the coach driver, and call on Dr. Dillon and Ernest Ames, to the mysterious warning letter tied to a stone, and the result.

The colonel listened with deepest interest, and said:

"Well, Cody, I begin to feel, with the soldiers, that you bear a charmed life, and glad I am of your escape.

"But I cannot see how we can connect Don Montebello with the affair without direct proof."

"It is proof that I am looking for, colonel," was the answer of the scout, and, going to his quarters, he talked over his escape with his men, yet kept the warning note thrown before him in the trail a secret, as he had from all save Colonel Carr.

Colonel Carr thought deeply over the narrow escape of Buffalo Bill, and the scout himself meditated more seriously upon it than he was wont to do where he was himself concerned.

He was seated in his quarters, about to retire for the night, after a long talk with his men, when a soldier



from the guardhouse came and said to him, as he stepped to the door, in answer to his knock:

"A letter for you, chief."

"Ah, Foley, thank you."

"Where did you get it?"

"I do not know more, sir, than the corporal of the guard said I was to at once bring it to you."

"Thank you," and, as the soldier left, Buffalo Bill opened his letter.

It was in an envelope, sealed and addressed as follows:

"Important! Deliver at once!

"To CHIEF OF SCOUTS, WILLIAM F. CODY—BUFFALO BILL,  
FORT RATTLE.

"By hand of Special Courier."

Buffalo Bill twice read over the address before he tore open the envelope.

He then saw that the handwriting was similar to that of the warning letter tied to the stone, and which he had laid carefully away among his treasures.

The letter was as follows:

"I write to warn Buffalo Bill of deadly danger.

"From undisputed sources I know that he is to be shadowed to death by the Gold Ghouls.

"They fear him, and feel that they have wrongs at his hands to avenge, while, with him removed from their path, they would be free to rob and commit other crimes oftener with far more safety than with him alive and on their track.

"They also believe that he is secretly planning to wipe them out.

"Let him be warned by this letter not to go on any trail alone.

"All trails will soon be ambushed for him, and, if alone, his death will quickly follow.

"This is no false alarm, but a warning in good faith, from

"AN UNKNOWN FRIEND."

The scout gave a long, low whistle when he had read this letter.

Then he read it carefully again.

His next move was to get the warning note of the afternoon and compare the two.

"One hand wrote both," he muttered.

"Now to find out who brought it."

He arose, put on his hat, and walked over to the guardhouse.

The corporal was there, and said that the sergeant of the guard had given it to him.

The sergeant was called, and he said that it had been given him by the officer of the day.

Then Buffalo Bill went to see the officer of the day. "Captain Baldwin, I have received a letter under peculiar circumstances, sir."

"Yes, I sent it to you, Cody."

"May I ask how you got it, sir?"

"It came in an odd way.

"It was before the last guard change that the sergeant came to me and reported that the sentinel at east gate had called the corporal of the guard and delivered to him a letter for you, said to have been handed to him by some one, I don't just recall by whom."

"That sentinel is off duty, sir, so may I ask you to send for him, please?"

"Assuredly," and Captain Baldwin ordered the sentinel just off duty at the east stockade gate to report him at once.

"My man, tell Mr. Cody just how you received the letter given you for him to-night."

"Yis, sur, I will."

"Will, sur, it was afther this way:

"I was afther being the sintinell at the 'aste gate, sur, and——"

"I know your post, my man, so just tell how you got the letter."

"That is jist what I'm afther duing, sur, ter plaise, yer.

"It was afther this way:

"I was afther bein' the sintinell at the 'aste gate, sur, and——"

"My Lord! and yet he is an American citizen; go on, my man," said Captain Baldwin.

"I will, sur.

"It was, as I was afther sayin' whin yer honor said, Oh, Lord, and that I was an American citizen, and was glad of it, sur, for, with the famine in ould Ireland, and——"

"See here, my man, I wish you to tell me at once how you got that letter," sternly said Captain Baldwin; and, turning to Buffalo Bill, he added:

"You can have him as a scout, Cody, if you want him, for he is a new man, and can learn to trail an Indian as soon as he can to be a soldier."

"Yis, sur, that's phwat I was afther sayin' to you, sur——"

"Tell the story in your own way, my man, for I'm officer of the night as well as the day, and time hangs heavy on my hands, while Chief Cody is used to keeping late hours, so just let us hear all about ould Ireland, St. Patrick, and any other interesting data you have on hand, and, incidentally, while we are between the devil and the deep sea, drop in any information you may have of how you got that letter."

"Yis, sur, I'll be afther duing that same," was the complacent response of the Irish-American soldier.

Seeing that the man must tell the story in his own way, Captain Baldwin allowed him to do so, and, after fifteen minutes of real Irish comedy, it was learned that a horseman approached his post, was challenged, was told to dismount, advance and give the countersign, and he obeyed, in that he dismounted and handed over the letter for delivery to the scout.

Captain Baldwin and Buffalo Bill at least enjoyed the story of the soldier, but, when asked why he



He detained the man when he did not give the counter-  
 sn, he very coolly replied:

"He was afther givin' me the letther, and, sure, I  
 ought thet was more thin the word.

"Thin he says good-avenin', as perlite as yez pl'ase,  
 yes me a salute, and walks back to his horse and  
 mist—he was gone like a spook."

"What did he look like?"

"Loike a man, sur."

"Was he young or old, short or tall?"

"Sure, and I didn't ask him his age, and he was  
 out as tall as mesilf, maybe shorter, maybe taller."

"Did he have any beard?" asked the scout.

"Indade had he not."

"A smooth face?"

"I didn't fale it, sur."

"Was his face clean shaven, as yours is now?"

"Faith, it was not my face at all, but his own."

"No whiskers, no mustache?"

"Now yez is talkin', sur; he hed a moostache, but it  
 as'n't overgrown, as I saw it in the darkness."

"He was alone?"

"Bedad, I was with him."

"No one else?"

"His horse, and maybe it was a mule."

"You can go, my man," said Captain Baldwin,  
 quickly; and, as the soldier departed, the officer burst  
 forth into a roar of laughter, which Buffalo Bill heart-  
 joined in.

"Talk about your Irish comedians, that fellow  
 knocks them all out, and the manager who put him on  
 the stage would make a fortune just to let him tell a  
 story in his own way.

"I shall congratulate Captain Kelly upon his having  
 such a man in his company, and offer him an exchange  
 for him; but Kelly is an Irishman himself, and would  
 ever know the man was funny," and Captain Baldwin  
 laughed again, while Buffalo Bill remarked:

"I'm of Irish descent myself, and I wonder if any of  
 my ancestors were that fellow's match."

"There's no telling, Cody, for a generation or two in  
 America civilizes a man wonderfully.

"Now, that fellow's children may make a name for  
 themselves, and his grandchild might be President  
 some day, for this new country is a wonderland; but  
 how to the letter?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you suspect who could have left it?"

"I do not know who my unknown friend can be, cap-  
 tain; but I thank you for your kindness, sir."

"I thank you, Cody, for being the cause of my spend-  
 ing a most enjoyable hour.

"Come again, and bring your friend with you,"  
 laughed the captain, as Buffalo Bill walked away.

Returning to his quarters, he read over the letter,  
 and then retired for the night, but, as soon as was con-  
 sistent with military etiquette, he went up to headquar-  
 ters to see the colonel.

Placing the whole affair before him, he gave the col-  
 onel a treat by his inimitable imitation of the soldier's  
 way of telling the story, for Buffalo Bill is a splendid  
 story-teller, and then they discovered the serious as-  
 pect of the case.

"Well, Cody, forewarned is being forearmed, at  
 least," said the colonel.

"Yes, sir, I certainly have one good friend to warn  
 me, and his warning will doubtless save my life, as I  
 know that I am being shadowed by the Gold Ghouls, so  
 can prepare against it."

"Yes, and I think it would be a good idea to carry  
 out the insinuation made by Don Montebello, the gold  
 king, and give you a secret bodyguard."

"Oh, no, sir; not that."

"Your men might shadow you, too, and be near to  
 render aid, if it was necessary."

"No, no, colonel; I would feel that I was haunted.

"It is bad enough, sir, to be shadowed by one's foes,  
 but far more to feel that your friends are dogging your  
 steps to protect your life.

"I would feel like the Emperor of Russia, colonel,  
 that I could not move without a guard, and would have  
 to wear an armor."

"I would feel very much the same way myself, Cody,  
 but, then, I do not wish you picked off by an outlaw."

"My men would avenge me."

"Oh, yes, fully; but you would not be here to enjoy  
 the satisfaction of knowing that you were avenged."

"But what will you do?"

"I shall put the letter to the test, sir."

"How do you mean?"

"I shall start out to Overland City to meet the coach,  
 in a couple of days, coming in, taking the lower trail  
 going, sir, and the upper one coming back."

"If you get back."

"Well, colonel, that is a risk I must take, and the test  
 of that letter must be made at once.

"I will act with all caution, sir."

The colonel said no more, and three days after Buf-  
 falo Bill rode away from the fort again, on the trail for  
 Overland City.

## CHAPTER X.

### DEFYING DEATH.

When he rode away from the fort, upon his second  
 run to Overland City with dispatches, Buffalo Bill  
 seemed to defy death in going in the face of the warn-  
 ing he had received.

But he went by one trail, was a couple of hours in  
 Overland City, and returned by another, and had not  
 met a friend or foe on the way.

On his third ride he came upon a stick in the middle  
 of the trail. In the top, which was split, was a piece  
 of paper, and, opening it, the scout read:

"A masked Gold Ghoul is lying in wait for you be-



hind Elephant Rock. He is alone, but means to kill you if he can."

"Thanks, my unknown protector, for the information."

"I'll just flank Elephant Rock, and rope in that gentleman."

The scout at once left the trail, made a flank movement, and came up behind the rock, which had obtained its name from being strangely like a giant elephant.

On the top of the rock, lying at full length, was a man, his rifle leveled up the trail.

But he uttered a cry of alarm when behind him came the words:

"Come down, pard; I want you!"

He turned a masked face upon the speaker, tried to bring his rifle to bear, and tumbled off the rock, with a bullet in his brain.

The scout had been too quick for him, and put in a shot from his revolver.

"Ah! another of Overland City's good citizens. I'll carry him in on his horse, which must be near here," Buffalo Bill decided, as he removed the mask from the face and recognized a man he had often seen before.

"His name is Brandon, I think, but I had no idea he was a Gold Ghoul, for he is one of the Regulators, too."

It was Brandon, the Gold Ghoul lieutenant, who had played a lone hand and lost the game.

An hour after, Buffalo Bill rode into Overland City, leading a horse, across the saddle of which was tied a dead form.

His arrival created a sensation, and a large crowd gathered.

"My guardian angel protected me again, Don, for I was warned to have an eye out for breakers ahead," said the scout, addressing the Don, who had ridden up, and who replied:

"Brandon an outlaw? I would never have suspected it! but I congratulate you, and I only wish I had such a protecting spirit."

"I have four scalps now for my tepee," said the scout, holding up the mask.

"But was he a Gold Ghoul?" asked a man, bluntly.

"He was lying in ambush for me; he wore this mask and this pin on his hat, and that is the Gold Ghoul badge. Being warned I got in my shot first," and Buffalo Bill turned his piercing eyes upon the man who had asked the question in a way that appeared as though he wished to cause trouble.

But the man did not reply or press the matter further, and soon after Buffalo Bill rode out of the camp, upon his return taking the same trail back to the fort.

He reached the fort without adventure, and, placing the three gold badges upon the colonel's desk, said, modestly:

"Another secret badge and another scalp, colonel."

"The colonel was astounded; and, when he had heard the story, said, earnestly:

"You are, indeed, shadowed, Cody, by foes and friends."

"It seems so, sir; and I can find out who my shadowers are, but not my friend-shadower."

"True, and it costs a life to find it out; but, if it is kept up without harm to you, even the large band of Gold Ghouls cannot stand the drain."

"I shall still continue my rides, colonel, though killing business is a bad one, and yet I suppose some must be executioner."

"I've a mind to order you to stay at the fort, or an escort with you, Cody."

"Don't do it, colonel, either way, I beg, sir; for you not see that I have a secret escort, that surely protects me? I hope it will continue so."

"Heaven grant it," was the colonel's fervent answer, and, when he saw Buffalo Bill start on his fourth patch-bearing mission, it was with a feeling of misgiving as to the result, and a strong desire to have an escort of scouts to follow him.

But he had the strongest confidence in the chief scouts, and felt that he was doing that which would bring outlawry to an end, though at terrible personal risk.

Buffalo Bill had reported to him that Dr. Dillon, Scout Ernest were beginning to fasten strong suspicion upon half a dozen men in Overland City, as being allies of the Gold Ghouls, and that the circle of doom was being drawn about them.

## CHAPTER XI.

### UNMASKING THE MASKERS.

There was not a shadow upon the face of Buffalo Bill as he rode away in the early morning from the fort, to go for the fourth time on his dispatch-bearing run.

The colonel, in his anxiety, had risen early to see him off and wish him godspeed, and as he rode away could hardly refrain from sending, as has been his custom after him.

"Which trail do you take to-day, Cody?" the colonel had asked.

"The cliff trail, sir, where I got my first warning. May it not be the last," was the low response.

Why he took the cliff trail that morning Buffalo Bill did not really know, but something prompted him to do so.

It was a trail where he could guard against ambush fairly well, save at the spot where the two men had been.

In approaching that barrier, the cliff made a sharp bend before it got to it, and by dismounting there, leaving his horse and going to the river, he could flank one who was in ambush there without being seen.

That he would receive another warning he could hardly believe.



He was nearing the bend, and about to halt, when a horseman came in sight.

"Ah, the Don!"

"There will be trouble, sure, for he is a bird of ill omen," said the scout.

But the Don was all smiles, and as polite as a dancing-master.

He shook hands with the scout, talked with him for a few minutes, and then said he was going to the fort, and would not be turned from his intention, as he had been before by remembering that he had to go to a distant camp.

As the scout started on, Montebello, the gold king, looked back, turned his horse quickly, drew his revolver, and was raising it to take deliberate aim at Buffalo Bill, who was not twenty feet from him, when a sharp report rang out from the top of the cliff, and a bullet crashed down through the top of the head of the intended assassin.

Buffalo Bill wheeled his horse quickly, drawing his revolver as he did so, and was astounded to see Montebello, the gold king, fall from his saddle, while his horse darted off from the trail.

He looked upward, and there, floating away from the cliff top, was a suspicious little cloud of bluish smoke.

Ere he could collect his wits as to what it all meant he heard a shot from around the cliff, and at once hurried his horse in that direction.

Before he rounded the sharp curve, however, several shots were fired, sounding above his head and on a level with him, and the next moment he dashed into view of a strange sight.

One masked man lay dead, another was on his knees and firing upward, while a third, with one arm in a sling, also had his revolver pointed at the top of the cliff.

Seeing the scout, the latter gave vent to a mild yell and leveled on him, and two revolvers flashed almost together.

The result was that Buffalo Bill's splendid horse fell dead, while the masked Gold Ghoul, with his arm in a sling, followed the animal's example and toppled over.

"If you are not Death Notch Dick, I'll smoke a pipe of powder," cried Buffalo Bill, as he sprang from the ground, having fallen with his horse, and made a run toward the outlaw he had killed, for the wounded one had seen on his knees now lay silent upon his face. Tearing off the mask, he revealed the face of Death Notch Dick, and, bounding to the other two, he unmasked them, too, recognizing both of them as men he had seen about the settlement, one being none other than the captain of the Ranger Regulators!

Just as he looked upward he heard a shout, and the words:

"Hurrah for Buffalo Bill!"

"We'll come down and join you."

"If that is not my boy pard, my right-bower, lucky

star, or whatever I choose to call him, I'll give up scouting," and Buffalo Bill shouted back:

"Come right down here, boy pard, and come a-jumping!"

With this, he walked back around the bend, giving his dead horse an affectionate caress and a kind word as he went by, while he dashed a tear from his eyes, as he said:

"We have been on many a trail together, dear old fellow, but this is your last one, and you caught the bullet intended for me."

The elegantly-clad form of Montebello, the gold king, lay where it had fallen, and, walking up to it, Buffalo Bill saw that the bullet had crashed through the large hat and sped down through the head.

It was some little time before he saw his Lucky Star coming, and he was not alone, for Gorman Field was with him.

Sherman Canfield ran up and grasped the scout's hand, and cried:

"I did not intend to let you know yet; but, Mr. Cody, that man is the chief of the Gold Ghouls. You killed Brandon, the lieutenant, on your last run, and my pard, Gorman, here, thought it best we should let you know now, so the balance of the gang could be corralled right off."

"Well, boy pard, it was a lucky day for me that I saved you from the Ranger Regulators, for you have saved my life time and again."

It was half an hour before explanations had been made by Sherman Canfield to fully satisfy Buffalo Bill; for it was Sherman who had sent the mysterious warnings to Bill, Gorman having spied upon the meetings of the Gold Ghouls while they were hiding together in the retreat they had found.

"Now, Mr. Cody, I am going to intrust to you a secret," said the boy.

"This is Mr. Gorman with me, my pard. He has been like an elder brother to me, and what has been done could not have been accomplished without his aid; in fact, he has done nearly all.

"The truth is, Mr. Gorman has had a hard life of it, and he was driven to join the outlaws; but he aided me to escape, then joined me, and together we planned to save you."

"But if Gorman goes to Overland City, the miners will kill him for a past offense which they believe him guilty of, though since they found out who the guilty one was. So he is going with me to hunt up the sergent's mine and help work it. I thus can keep my pledge. He will go there at once, while I will go with you and pick out the Gold Ghouls and guide you to the retreat, for I know it well."



Buffalo Bill listened attentively to the youth, and then stepped forward and grasped the hand of the outlaw, while he said:

"I owe more to you, pard, than I can ever repay, and your secret will be safe."

Then, turning to Sherman Canfield, he continued:

"Find out where these dead outlaws left their horses."

"I know; they were a quarter of a mile from here."

"I will go and bring them up," said Gorman, and he walked rapidly away, while Buffalo Bill remarked:

"I have lost a splendid horse, but there is his match, and I appropriate him to ride to Overland City and the fort, for he belongs to you, as you fired the shot that killed the chief."

"Then accept him as a present from me, sir, and I'll catch him for you now."

The fine animal was caught and brought up, and Buffalo Bill said that he would accept him under the circumstances, as an outlaw's property belonged to the captor.

"Now, Mr. Cody, let me tell you that this bundle you see on his saddle contains his mask, cloak, robe and a hump, for Gorman told me that he wore a false hump to disguise his form, and always spoke in a changed voice, besides he is not a Mexican, but a Canadian, and as Montebello, the gold king, affected an accent in his speech he did not have."

"He played it well; but here comes Pard Gorman. Now we'll gather the bodies, and then I wish you to do some courier duty for me."

"Certainly, sir."

"Go with all speed to the fort, and ask Colonel Carr to please send my scouts here, and a troop of cavalry, as well, for it would raise a riot to take the Don's body into Overland City without a good force, for no one would believe at first he was guilty."

"Ride the Don's horse, now I think of it, and come back on one of mine with the troops."

It took Sherman Canfield just a minute to mount and get away, and he went off like a rocket, leaving Buffalo Bill and Gorman together with the dead.

For a while they talked, and then Buffalo Bill said:

"Now, pard, you can go and get your horse and Sherman's, and bring his here."

"Then my advice is that you at once start for your retreat up near the mine. Your boy pard will come there and join you when the trouble blows over. He will go with me into Overland City, and the men who

belong to the outlaw band he will point out and I bag them, after which we will strike the retreat clean those out who are there."

"I think I had better go with you, sir, for I do like to run off like a coward."

"You are no coward, for I remember you well, and I am glad you told me your story."

"But I recall the charge against you in the mine and that it was proven false; but you would get trouble. When the Gold Ghouls are wiped out no one will know you once were an outlaw, and our boy I and I will keep the secret."

Thus urged, Gorman Field did as Buffalo Bill requested; and, having brought Sherman's horse to scene, he bade the scout good-by and rode away.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE ROUND-UP.

It was a proud moment for Sherman Canfield when he came up to the spot where Buffalo Bill stood, riding by the side of Colonel Carr, who had himself come to the scene of the tragedy, the youth telling his story as they rode along together.

Besides the colonel's escort of an aide and squad of cavalry, Captain Baldwin's troop had come along, a score of Buffalo Bill's scouts.

A wild cheer broke forth as they all beheld the chief standing by the dead bodies of Montebello and his band.

The colonel and Buffalo Bill had a short, earnest talk; then the bodies were placed in an ambulance that had been brought along, and the march was taken for Overland City.

Buffalo Bill rode in advance as scout, with Sherman Canfield by his side, and following came half of the scouts.

Then the colonel and his escort, the troop following with the ambulance behind it, and the rest of the scouts bringing up the rear.

There was a stir in Overland City when the cavalrycade appeared, and as men came along whom Sherman Canfield recognized as outlaws they were seized, with the names of the Regulators, who were also secret Gold Ghouls, having been furnished by Gorman, and also were arrested, though not without fatal results in some cases where they resisted.

When Colonel Carr himself denounced Don Montebello, the gold king, as the chief of the Gold Ghouls,



and ordered a lieutenant to take a squad of men and seize his house and effects, the bewildered people realized that there was more guilt in Overland City than they had ever supposed.

Leaving Captain Baldwin and his troop in charge of Overland City, Colonel Carr returned to the fort, while Buffalo Bill and his scouts dashed away, under the guidance of Sherman Canfield, for the secret retreat of the outlaws.

They entered it at night, before a warning could be given, and the dozen men found there, though surprised, fought desperately, and no mercy was shown them.

Laden with plunder, the scouts next day returned to the fort, to find that short work had been made of those who were really guilty, for Colonel Carr had ordered an immediate trial by court-martial and sentence of death had been quickly pronounced upon them, and was almost as speedily executed.

Sherman Canfield found himself a young hero, and was given an officer's salute whenever he went about the fort.

Soon after Sherman started East, and Gorman accompanied him.


They visited Sergeant Fessenden's widow, in her pleasant home, and Sherman told her the whole story of her husband's death.

Then he went to Gorman's home, and found out just how the land lay there, and that the fugitive was never believed guilty of his brother's murder, under the circumstances, after his letter had been read, and a handsome property was there awaiting his coming back.


But, though Sherman Canfield returned once more to college for a year or so, he went on several trips again to the wild West, meeting with numerous adventures, and few who know him to-day suspect the strange life he has led with his lifelong friends, Gorman Field and Buffalo Bill, the prince of the Platte, as he is often called in Nebraska.

THE END.

Next week's issue, No. 69, will contain "BUFFALO BILL'S SPY SHADOWER; or, THE HERMIT OF ZION CANYON." This is a wonderful story of one of the most wonderful places in the world—the Great Canyon of the Colorado. Buffalo Bill's adventures there have never been told before. They will thrill you. Look out for them.

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# THRILLING ADVENTURE



Look on page 31 for the announcement of the new contest, boys.

Isn't it a dandy?

What do you think of those prizes? Corkers!

The Thrilling Adventure contest is closed. There are stacks of entries that have not been printed yet, and for several weeks we will continue to print them.

Names of the prize-winners will be printed in three weeks. In the meantime, get into the new contest.

## Falling Off a Train.

(By Joe Hill, N. J.)

Last winter, as some boys and I were coming home from the copper mines in Arlington, we got on a freight car that would take us near home.

We were all right until we were going to get off.

I was the first one, and as I started to go down the ladder one of the brakemen shouted at us.

I looked up, but lost my balance on the ladder, which was slippery with ice, and fell on the sort of iron run-board at the bottom of the car. I slipped off of this into the snow, my head being about five inches from the car wheels.

I rolled down an embankment, which the train was going along, and when the other boys got to me I was crying.

It was a narrow escape from death.

## My First Balloon Ascension.

(By Earl Schoenburger, Ohio.)

One day in August, during the week of the County Fair, there was going to be a balloon ascension. There was a large crowd there.

There were many men and boys holding the balloon down while it was filling. When it was filled, the man who was going to make the ascension gave the order, "Let her go."

I did not let go in time, and before I knew it I was about twenty feet above the ground.

I had a notion to drop, I did not know what the result might be, so I hung on.

Higher and higher we went. When I started they all halloed, "hang on," and I got so high I could not hear them any more.

When we were about five hundred feet high I looked

down. Everything looked far away. At last my arm got so tired I let go the balloon. Fortunately my foot caught in the ropes of the parachute, and I hung head downward.

Then I knew no more, until I found myself at home in bed, with my leg broken and a big gash cut in my head. I got well in about four weeks, but I never forgot my balloon ride. I don't think many boys have had such a balloon ride.

## Through the Ice.

(By Joe Bond, Pa.)

It was in the winter of the year 1897, when I was about ten years old, that I had a very narrow escape from being drowned.

Where I live there is a brickyard, about three squares away. The men had been digging clay for the yard, and there was a pond where they had been digging. When this pond was frozen over, and I, with two other boys, went there to have some fun on the ice. I did not know that the ice was thin, and I started to go across.

I was in the middle when the ice began to crack. I tried to reach shore, but failed, and in a moment I found myself in the icy water. I cried for help, as I could not swim.

A man who was riding on a wheel jumped off and tried to save me. His wheel was smashed and he jumped in after me.

He could not get at me, though, on account of the ice.

I had gone down twice and was going down the third time when a plank was shoved out to me. I managed to grasp it and was drawn ashore. I must have become unconscious, for there was a blank in which I don't remember anything. When I came to, I found myself in the driers of the brickyard; that is, the place where they dry bricks. I must have presented a comical sight, for I had



a pair of overalls and a sweater of the engineer's, and old cap. At any rate they were very kind to me, for they dried my clothes and gave me a dose of ginger, so that when I went home I was none the worse for my adventure. But I would not go through it again for a thousand dollars. Boys, take my advice, and don't venture on adventures until you have tested them.

### Kicked By a Horse.

(By Hays Eckert, Cal.)

When I was about five years old I was in the first grade in the public school. One day I was going to school, and my friend, who lived across the street, called me to come over and see his new pony. I went up to him and patted him, but he did not like it and kicked me away. I did not know anything till the next day, but I came to, and was up in a few days. That is the only narrow escape I ever had.

### Enough to Make Your Hair Curl

(By Allatt Obrock, Ohio.)

We were out hunting, and when we were coming home my cousin saw a bird and he was going to shoot at it. I told him not to do it. The boys are in the field, so he put his gun on his shoulder. He did not know that it was cocked, and all of a sudden the bullet went through my cap. It took off some hair. I fell down. My cousin looked as white as a sheet. I tell you that was a narrow escape.

### A Narrow Escape.

(By John Murphy, N. Y.)

One day, on the 3d of May, there was a fire at a paint store on Plymouth street, near Bridge, and I was going across the gutter when an engine came along and the horses nearly ran over me. My playmate just pulled me away in time. That was the narrowest escape I ever had.

### Saved from Lake Winnebago.

(By H. W. Luscher, Wisconsin.)

In the summer of 1898, while camping on the west shore of Lake Winnebago, near Oshkosh, Wis., my three comrades and myself were invited to take a trip to Island Park. We were to go on a pleasure launch owned by one of the boys' father. Island Park is a pretty little island, most in the center of the lake, and is a very pleasant place on which to spend a day's outing. The day of the picnic dawned bright. We started for the boathouse shortly after old Sol put in his appearance, in order to have everything in readiness for an early start. Being home on the launch we had steam up and were ready to start as the last of the party arrived, and were off as soon as all the eatables were stowed away in the locker. There is quite a long pier built out off the northern

shore of the island. As we neared the shore I was in the bow of the boat ready to jump on this pier to tie the launch fast. The line, one end of which I held in my hand, lay coiled back of me. When there was but six to seven feet between the launch and pier I jumped.

But instead of landing on the pier, as I expected to do, I was jerked back, striking the boat and falling into the water. Not only was I in danger of drowning, but also of being crushed between the boat and piles.

The gentleman who caused the accident by standing on the coil of rope, preventing it from unwinding, caught me by my hair as I rose to the surface of the lake, and, with the assistance of my comrades, pulled me from the water.

With the exception of a lump on my head and a soaking I was none the worse for my experience, and after donning a pair of old overalls I joined in with the crowd and had a very good time.

### Losing Two Toes.

(By Edward Houlihan, Ill.)

One day two boys and myself were going down the Chicago and Erie Railroad. One of the boys suggested that we take a ride.

We got on a switch train, and climbed up on top. We were walking along the top, and just as I was stepping over to another car I lost my balance and fell between the cars.

My foot got caught between the bumpers, and I was brought to the hospital and had two toes cut off.

### In the Rapids.

(By James Gray, New York.)

My little adventure took place on the Mohawk River, near Little Falls.

A friend and myself were out rowing one day and had decided to take a swim. We rowed to the shore and started to undress. I had my clothes off first and sprang into the water.

I swam out to the middle of the stream, and glancing back at my friend, who was still on the shore, I discovered, to my surprise, that I was several yards below him. The swift current was carrying me down the stream, and I was unable to resist it. Then, to my horror, I heard the roar of the falls a short distance below.

My friend, who saw my danger, was about to swim out to me, but I called to him to row out with the boat. In the meantime I had managed to get my feet on a large rock, but the swift waters would not allow me to remain there; they dragged me away and I was hurled down toward the falls. The water was becoming swifter and swifter, and I felt sure that I would be dashed on the rocks below. My friend, however, came to my rescue in the nick of time. He helped me into the boat, and with our combined efforts at the oars we rowed away from the angry waters.

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The three boys who send in the three most interesting accounts will each receive an **Eastman Pocket Kodak**, with complete outfit. The camera takes picture 1½x2 inches; uses film, and has capacity for twelve pictures without reloading; weight six ounces. This wonderful little camera takes pictures equal to the most expensive. It makes negatives of such sharpness and definition that beautiful enlargements of any size can be made from them. Has perfect Achromatic Lens of fixed focus, Rotary Shutter, with sets of three stops, square View Finder, and covered with fine Seal Grain Leather. Takes snap shots or time exposures. Easily carried in pocket or on bicycle. Complete with roll of film for twelve exposures and Leather Carrying Case, with room for three extra film cartridges.

The five boys who send in the five next best accounts will each receive a **Safety Hunting Ax**. Dimensions over all 11x4 inches; weight 18 ounces. The blade is made of solid tool steel, finely tempered and highly polished. The handle is made of mild steel, nickel plated on copper, with handle plates of engraved hard rubber. The guard is of sheet steel, hinged on a spring in such a manner that either open or closed it is firmly held in position. The construction is unique

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